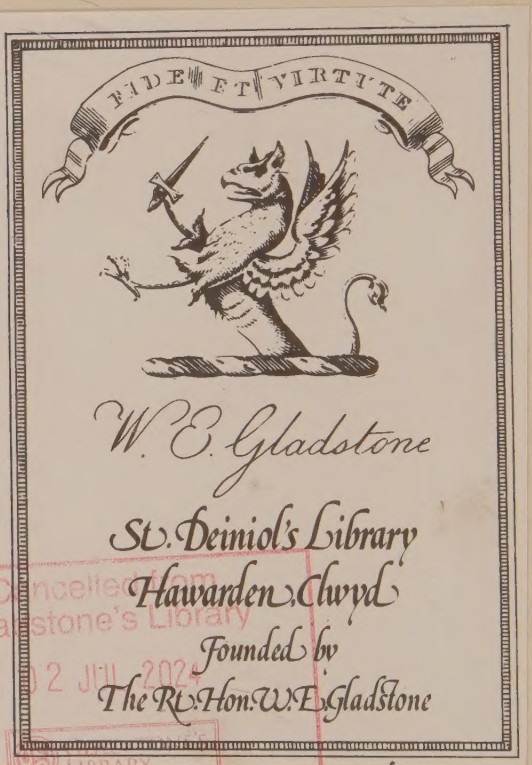

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THE REVELATION OF JOHN

A HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

THE BAKER & TAYLOR COMPANY
NEW YORK

THE CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON AND EDINBURGH

THE MARUZEN-KABUSHIKI-KAISHA
TOKYO, OSAKA, KYOTO, FUKUOKA, SENDAI

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THE REVELATION OF JOHN

A HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

By

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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Published November 1919

Composed and Printed By
The University of Chicago Press
Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.

PREFACE

The purpose of the following pages is to explain the meaning of the Book of Revelation as its author intended it to be understood by those to whom it was first addressed. The point of view maintained throughout the volume has been that of John and his Christian contemporaries in the Roman province of Asia.

In order to make that ancient situation clear to modern readers, care has been taken first to explain the specific circumstances which called forth the writing of John's book. And since he chose to employ that peculiar type of literary expression known as apocalyptic, it has been deemed advisable to give a fairly full account of other writings of this class current among those ancient peoples. A knowledge of the various apocalyptic books then extant and acquaintance with the method of their composition are prerequisite to a correct understanding of the Apocalypse of John.

In the treatment of the text itself a simple method of procedure has been adopted. The

contents of the book have been analyzed into paragraphs with descriptive captions inserted to exhibit the progression of the author's thought. A new English rendering of the text printed section by section (in italics) has been followed by a running commentary explaining, where explanation seemed necessary, the meaning of John's language. This explanatory material is not in the form of minute and disconnected comments upon selected words or phrases, but consists of interpretative paragraphs elucidating obscure matters in the text. This arrangement has been adopted in order to encourage consecutive reading, without which a true understanding of the Book of Revelation can hardly be acquired. For those who may wish also to use this volume as a work of reference a full list of passages has been included in the Table of Contents.

A word of explanation regarding the English rendering is needed. The translation is designedly interpretative and sometimes paraphrastic. The intention has been to reproduce John's mind as clearly as possible and not simply to give a slavish rendering of his language. As one of the early Greek Fathers very pertinently remarked, John's "dialect

and language are not accurate Greek but he uses barbarous idioms and in some places he even makes grammatical errors." It has not seemed practicable to attempt to reproduce in English the peculiar flavor of John's imperfect Greek. Readers who desire an acquaintance with that phase of the subject had better resort to the original. But it has not always been easy to determine exactly what John had in mind when writing some of his strange phrases. Undoubtedly he was a Jew before his conversion to Christianity, and therefore certain of his difficult expressions have been rendered according to the Semitic idiom in which he seems sometimes to have been thinking. Moreover, he was particularly fond of Old Testament phraseology, which he frequently introduced for rhetorical effect and often at the expense of clearness in statement. Under these circumstances the only procedure consonant with the aims of the present volume was a freely interpretative rendering of the text, thus obviating unnecessary comment upon linguistic minutiae.

The needs of the general reader have been kept chiefly in mind. The detailed discussion of critical problems has been deliberately

avoided, but their importance has not been ignored. The present interpretation has been made in strict accord with the findings of modern historical study, and the controlling purpose of the whole presentation has been to give in untechnical form an exposition of what John's language meant to himself and his contemporaries. It is from this standpoint only that modern readers can arrive at a true appreciation of the value of the book.

Shirley Jackson Case

University of Chicago
October 18, 1919

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CHAPTER I

THE DEMAND FOR REVELATION

The Book of Revelation came out of a grave crisis in the experience of Christians living in western Asia Minor over eighteen hundred years ago. The dominant interest of the book was to encourage loyalty to the Christian faith, then under persecution by the heathen authorities. At Pergamum opposition to the new religion had been so strenuous that a certain Antipas had fallen a martyr to the cause. The loyalty of other communities had also been put to a severe test, although no specific instances of martyrdom are cited. But still greater sufferings were thought to be imminent. The author, who refers to himself as a Christian named John, believed that in the near future the Christians of Asia would be cast into prison, brought to trial, and called upon generally to abandon their faith.

Since Revelation was written to meet the exigencies of this particular crisis, it reflects on every page the fears and the hopes of the author and his readers. In fact it ministered so

directly to contemporary needs that later readers, far removed from that age and unfamiliar with the surroundings of those early Christians, have often found great difficulty in understanding this ancient document. The message of the book cannot be understood without a knowledge of the immediate historical circumstances which called it into existence. But these circumstances in turn were a phase of the peculiar social and religious conditions then prevailing in the Roman province of Asia.

I. LIFE IN THE PROVINCE OF ASIA

Politically the eastern portion of Asia Minor had been under the control of Rome for more than a hundred years before the beginning of the Christian Era. The government of this territory, known as the province of Asia, was administered by an official called a proconsul, appointed from time to time by the Senate in Rome. Generally speaking, the duties of this governor were threefold. He was responsible for collecting the revenues from the province, for the administration of justice, and for the maintenance of good order. But he in turn delegated many of these duties to Roman subordinates or to native authorities. Taxes were

collected by his appointees, municipal courts had wide powers, and local officials policed different cities or districts. Even when apprehended by the authorities, Christians did not under all circumstances necessarily come before the proconsul personally. Nevertheless they quite properly held Rome responsible for that administration of affairs which made their arrest and persecution possible.

Early Christians living in this territory were usually residents of the cities, where they found themselves part of a very complex population. Asia was one of the most densely peopled provinces of the Empire. For centuries its principal cities had been the meeting place of travelers from all parts of the Mediterranean world. In such commercial and industrial centers as Ephesus and Smyrna, people of different nationalities mingled together freely, making their respective contributions toward the exceedingly syncretistic life of that day. Many of these foreigners were Jews. John himself is evidently a Christian convert from Judaism, as were doubtless many of his fellow-believers in each of the churches addressed. But as a whole these early Christian communities were composed very largely of Gentiles who might be

either natives of Asia or immigrants from Greece, Syria, Babylonia, Egypt, or Italy.

This fusion of nationalities involved the persistence of a variety of interests and tastes, even within a relatively small Christian group. It is not surprising to find John appealing to his readers with a profusion of images, some inspired by the Old Testament, others derived from the writings of later Judaism, and still others suggested by popular gentile beliefs current in the Graeco-Roman world. The varied and adventurous character of John's imagery corresponds admirably with the complex social order by which he was surrounded.

On the economic side of their life early Christians have become almost proverbial for their poverty. But the province of Asia was one of the most prosperous districts of the Roman Empire, and at an early date offered Christians an opportunity for improving their financial condition. Apparently some progress had been made in this direction before the Book of Revelation was written. John vehemently upbraids the Laodiceans for self-satisfaction with their worldly possessions, which he thinks will stand them in poor stead when the impending day of divine wrath presently breaks

upon mortals. Then they will find that they have not been enriched, but that they have been impoverished by their gold, fine raiment, and unguents. John would have them exchange their enjoyment of these earthly treasures for the more usual Christian experience of self-sacrificing poverty.

Revelation also offers a tacit protest against the growing tendency on the part of Christians to engage in trade and commerce. John reminds his readers that the heavenly book of life does not contain the name of any person who has performed the rites of emperor-worship necessary to procure an imperial permit to buy and sell.[1] Moreover he takes particular delight in describing the disappointment awaiting those merchants who have grown rich catering to the luxurious demands of the age. When Rome falls by the sudden stroke of God they will lament because there is no longer a market for their merchandise.[2]

Early Christians had been encouraged by their leaders to be very exclusive in their social relationships. Prior to their acceptance of Christianity, gentile converts had participated in a variety of social enjoyments. They joined

[1] Rev. 13:8, 17. [2] Rev. 18:12–19.

in the celebration of public festivals, they ate with their neighbors at the banquets in the temples, they attended the gladiatorial shows in the amphitheater, they witnessed the chariot races in the circus, they watched the contests of the athletes in the stadium, or they went with their friends to the theater. But on accepting Christianity they were advised to forego all these social pleasures, and as a rule they seem to have heeded this advice.

While Christians remained relatively few in number and were daily expecting a return of their Lord to destroy the present evil world, they were content to renounce pagan society. But as the membership of the churches increased, and the passing of the years dulled the hope of an early catastrophic end of the world, Christians gradually began to recognize the necessity of more intimate participation in the affairs of the present world. They discovered that their earlier exclusiveness not only restricted their own legitimate secular activities, but caused them to be misunderstood by their neighbors, and so constituted an artificial barrier to the success of the new religion. Yet this new way of thinking inevitably called forth opposition. John is most vigorous in his hos-

tility toward this new liberalism. When he reprimands the churches for the loss of their first love and for the spirit of lukewarmness which they manifest, he doubtless has in mind that lack of community spirit which resulted from their friendly attitude toward contemporary society. The advocates of this genial attitude are denounced as false and sinful teachers whom God will punish in the day of judgment.

The very severity of John's denunciation is in itself an indication of the presence of a growing disposition among the Christians of Asia to come into closer contact with the existing social order, making such concessions thereto as would enable them to live more amicably with their gentile neighbors. The emergence of this problem of social adjustment is very significant. Although John stoutly maintained the older view, that Roman society was not to be tolerated but to be suddenly destroyed, history proved itself on the side of John's opponents, who possibly were already beginning to suspect that not catastrophic destruction of paganism but a gradual process of Christianization to be effected through more intimate contact with society was the means by which the new religion

would ultimately establish its sway in Mediterranean lands.

II. THE CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS SITUATION

Religious interests occupied a large place in the life of Gentiles living in the province of Asia. Temples dedicated to the worship of various deities were as common then as churches are today in Christian countries. The populace participated freely in religious ceremonies, especially in festivities celebrated on numerous holidays set apart for that purpose. When, as often happened, a particular religion was the property of a municipality, the rites were kept up at public expense. All the citizens were taxed to pay for constructing the temple, to secure splendid images, to maintain the priests, to provide animals for the sacrifice, and to defray the expenses of feasts and festivals. Cults thus supported were literally the property of the people, who by participating in the ceremonies freely availed themselves of the privileges to which they were entitled. These public religious ceremonies formed a very conspicuous feature in the life of the ancient world, and when John wrote they were nowhere more in evidence than in the cities of the province of Asia.

The more ordinary activities of daily life were also bound up with a wealth of religious associations. Then as now civic officials took the oath of office in the name of a deity. In private life religion surrounded the individual with its help and protection. Many persons went quietly to the temples with votive offerings in gratitude or supplication for special favors from the gods. Not infrequently worship was conducted in the home, where images of the gods were always to be found, and where the father of the family might officiate as priest for the members of the household. The tradesman or the mariner often performed his own private religious ceremonies to insure the prosperity of his undertakings. Numerous clubs, mutual benefit associations, and trade guilds, common in those days, usually adopted a certain divinity as protector of their corporate life. In fact among all classes of society and under widely varying circumstances religious interests dominated the life of that day.

Many different deities were worshiped in the province of Asia. At an early date the gods of Greece had traveled across the Aegean, finding a second home among the residents of Asia Minor, who henceforth worshiped not only the

local deities long established in this territory, but also their more illustrious competitors from Greece. Paul learned to his sorrow that the people of Ephesus were fanatically devoted to Artemis.[1] She was the patron deity of the city, one of its chief claims to glory being the magnificence of her sanctuary and the pomp displayed in her worship. In attendance at her shrine was a host of officials, including guards, caretakers, singers, instructors, priests, and priestesses. Both public funds and private bequests furnished her temple-treasury ample means for the maintenance of one of the most magnificent cults of antiquity.

In the prominence given to Greek deities among the Asian cities Ephesus was no exception, nor was reverence restricted to a single deity. Practically every one of the great Olympians was worshiped throughout the province of Asia, and not infrequently the lesser gods of Greece also received fitting honors. In Smyrna there were numerous temples erected in honor of various deities, including Zeus and Cybele. The altar of Zeus at Pergamum was the city's chief glory, though Athena, Dionysos, and Asklepios were associated with Zeus as

[1] Acts 19:23 ff.

patron deities of the city. Invalids came from far and near to visit the sanctuary of the Pergameme Asklepios, whose fame as a healer was heralded broadcast by successive generations of convalescents. Everywhere, throughout the province of Asia, Christians were surrounded by the cults of both native Asiatic and imported Greek deities, and all gentile converts to the new religion had formerly been worshipers of these heathen gods.

Other foreign deities came into Asia from the west and south, brought thither by slaves, artisans, traders, and travelers from different parts of the world. When strangers from Phrygia, Syria, Persia, Babylonia, or Egypt pressed their way into western Asia Minor in sufficient numbers to constitute distinct groups, they assembled in communities of their own to establish the worship of their ancestral gods. Long before the end of the first century of the Christian Era these foreigners had often become so numerous and so prosperous in the larger cities about the Mediterranean that they not only constituted independent worshiping groups but could boast of temples reared in honor of their own gods, whose priests sometimes conducted a vigorous missionary propaganda on

behalf of their religion. By these means the inhabitants of the province of Asia had become familiar with, and in some cases worshipers of, such popular oriental and Egyptian deities as the great Phrygian Mother of the Gods and her consort Attis, the Ashtart and Eshmun of the Phoenicians, more familiarly known in the Graeco-Roman world as Aphrodite and Adonis, the Isis and Osiris of the Egyptians, and perhaps to some extent the Ishtar and Tammuz of the Babylonians, as well as the Mithra of the Persians.

Jews were numerous in the province of Asia. Long before the time of John they had been residing in considerable numbers in Ephesus, Pergamum, Sardis, and neighboring cities. Not only did they maintain their distinct nationality, but special concessions were frequently granted them in deference to their religious scruples. In addition to the privilege of perpetuating their ancestral faith without hindrance, they were exempted from military service and were permitted to send contributions of money to the Temple at Jerusalem. They differed from other foreigners in absolutely refusing to observe any religious rites except those of their own sect, but in spite of their

unwillingness to indulge in any form of pagan worship their own places of worship were thrown open to the public. Every Sabbath the sacred Scriptures were read and expounded to members of the congregation, including any Gentiles who might care to listen. Not a few Gentiles availed themselves of this opportunity, admiring the Jewish faith for its antiquity, its rigid monotheism, and its high moral demands. Judaism was thus a missionary religion which had already attracted attention among the Gentiles of Asia before the earliest Christian preachers appeared upon the scene.

As a whole the religious situation in Asia must have been a very impressive fact in the life of the early Christians. While they adopted a policy of aloofness, at the same time making it perfectly evident that they were positively unsympathetic toward the various religions of their neighbors, they could not separate themselves completely from the wealth of pagan associations permeating that ancient society. Although they might refrain from participating in the religious festivities which they were taxed to support, as members of the municipality they were compelled to bear their share of its financial burdens. They could refuse to

patronize the image-maker, and could purge all idolatrous practices from their own private life, but when they emerged from the privacy of their own homes they at once found themselves surrounded by the glories of pagan art with its magnificent temples and innumerable images on every hand. In fact the mere perpetuation of physical existence within society as then constituted compelled Christians to breathe the stifling atmosphere of a long-established paganism.

Judaism was a less overpowering factor in the Christians' environment. Yet they had no fellowship with the adherents of this faith, notwithstanding its numerous similarities to their own. Indeed the larger common heritage seemed only to furnish greater controversial stimuli to widen the breach between the two groups. The Jewish synagogue and the pagan temple were alike inaccessible to the devout Christian.

Thus unhappily situated with respect to their religious surroundings, and finding themselves hopelessly in the minority, it is not surprising that Christians regarded the existing order of things as a state of irredeemable wretchedness from which ultimate deliverance

could be secured only through some desperate act of divine intervention. Their situation made possible a ready acceptance of belief in the early end of the world and in a speedy return of Christ to establish a new régime of perfection upon the earth.

III. THE RELIGIOUS ATTITUDE OF ROME

Another significant factor in the experience of the Christians in Asia was the religious attitude of the Roman authorities. The Romans were keenly interested in religion. It was commonly believed that from the very outset the destinies of the nation had been controlled by the gods, who had so ordered history as to make Rome the dominant political power in the ancient world. From time immemorial formal religious ceremonies had been carefully observed by the state, and, on different occasions under circumstances of peculiar distress, new rites had been deliberately introduced as a means of securing a firmer grip upon divine protection. With the inauguration of the imperial system, Augustus gave especial attention to religious matters, recognizing that the religious appeal furnished one of the best means of fostering patriotism. People who believed

that the mighty Roman Empire was a creation of the gods were almost as ready to revere the government as to worship the gods themselves. This popular attitude, widely prevalent throughout the first century A.D., particularly in the eastern Mediterranean lands, boded ill for Christians who denied the power of the pagan deities and predicted the early downfall of the Roman state.

Roman tradition reported that in earlier days the government had rigorously supervised religious activities. In Rome itself an imaginary circular line called the pomerium marked off the sacred precincts within which the national deities alone were admitted. Every citizen was expected to observe scrupulously the rites prescribed by law and to refrain from participating in the ceremonies of strange worships. But this original exclusiveness was soon outgrown. As Rome arose to the dignity of a world-power, contact with foreign nations resulted in the introduction of new deities inside the pomerium, the rites of other strange gods were permitted by state authority outside the pomerium, and many foreign cults flourished within the city, though never given recognition by the state.

As a matter of fact the later history of Roman religion is largely the story of the adoption of new deities sanctioned by senatorial decree and thereby officially incorporated in the national worship. In this way practically all the gods of Greece had emigrated to Rome before the beginning of the Christian Era. Other deities from Asia and Egypt had followed in their train. Though not generally admitted within the pomerium, they were permitted a place in the outlying sections of the city and received worship not only from foreign residents but occasionally also from native Romans. New private cults of which the government ordinarily took no notice were also numerous. During early imperial times foreigners flocked into Rome in constantly greater numbers, bringing with them from the densely populated provinces of Egypt, Syria, or Asia their native gods, whom they continued to worship with impunity almost within the very shadow of the Capitol.

Thus the Romans were compelled by force of circumstances to be tolerant toward foreign religions. Though the authorities retained the right to suppress any cult that operated without permission from the state, as a matter of

fact even within the city of Rome itself they rarely intervened except when the political or moral welfare of the public seemed in danger. Normally the adherents of every cult, both in Rome and in the provinces, observed their own rites unmolested by the authorities.

The personal attitude of the early emperors was similarly lenient. Their general policy was not one of hostility toward the religions of their foreign subjects, but one of open toleration tempered by a benevolent supervision looking toward the preservation of the national welfare. To be sure there were exceptions to this rule, but they only served to emphasize the general principle of toleration. This general attitude of indifference or toleration on the part of the early emperors is a fact that has been overlooked by certain ancient Christian writers in their zeal to lay the blame for all the persecutions of Christians directly at the door of the imperial palace.

A conspicuous example of Roman toleration is seen in the treatment accorded Judaism. It is true that on certain occasions the Jews of Rome and of Italy incurred the displeasure of the authorities and were temporarily ordered out of the country. But these outbursts of

hostility were due to special causes and not to the mere fact that Judaism was a foreign religion. As early as 139 B.C. Jews in Rome were looked upon with suspicion, but they continued to increase in numbers, many of them being Roman citizens, though still adhering to the faith of their fathers. In the year 19 A.D. Tiberius ordered them expelled from Rome because four Jewish adventurers had appropriated for their own uses a large contribution to the Temple made by a wealthy Roman lady who had embraced the Jewish faith. A few years later Claudius issued a similar order on the ground that Jews were disturbing the peace. Notwithstanding these temporary restrictions large numbers of Jews continued to reside in Rome, where they perpetuated their own religion without serious interference from the authorities.

In the provinces Judaism was not only tolerated but positively protected by Rome. As early as the time of Julius Caesar, Jews had won Roman favor and a number of decrees had been issued to insure them special privileges and protections. One of these decrees is of sufficient interest to be quoted in part:

> To the magistrates, council, and people of the Parians, greeting. The Jews of Delos, and certain

Jews temporarily residing there, have met me in the presence of your ambassadors and signified that you by a decree prevent them from practicing their ancestral customs and sacred rites. Now it is not pleasing to me that such decrees be enacted against our friends and allies, preventing them from living according to their own customs and from making contributions for their common suppers and sacred rites, a thing which they are not prevented from doing even in Rome.[1]

Augustus' attitude toward the Jews was most tolerant. Even in Rome he allowed them to retain the rights of Roman citizenship which they had acquired, and he did not compel them to alter any of their traditional religious customs. They were permitted to have numerous synagogues where they freely assembled for worship on the Sabbath. No objections were raised to the contributions of money sent by them from Rome to support the religious services of the Temple at Jerusalem. Jews shared equally with other subjects of the emperor in the public distributions of money or of grain, and when the date for the distribution chanced to fall on the Sabbath their portion was reserved for assignment on the following day.

The example of Augustus was followed by subsequent emperors. With few exceptions

[1] Josephus *Antiquities* XIV. x. 8.

even in Rome, but particularly in the provinces, the Jews enjoyed perfect religious freedom so far as the imperial policy was concerned, save for the momentary folly of Caligula in ordering his image to be placed in the Temple at Jerusalem. The imperial attitude of toleration was not materially affected even by the revolutionary activities of the Jews during the first and second centuries A.D. The revolt resulting in the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., and the uprising of Barcochba, ending in the complete downfall of the Jewish state in 135 A.D., greatly increased popular prejudice against them as a people, but did not result in any formal suppression of their religion. Acknowledgment of Caesar's lordship was demanded in the case of the Sicarii, who fled to Alexandria after Jerusalem fell in 70 A.D., but no such demand was made of the Jews of good repute who had handed these disturbers over to the Romans.[1]

In view of the general attitude of religious toleration practiced by the emperors, Christians had no occasion to anticipate any opposition from the state. The old laws designed to safeguard ancient Roman rites had not been

[1] Josephus *War* VII. x. 1.

formally abolished, but for centuries the authorities had ignored the letter of the law and had tolerated many an unlicensed cult, even permitting Roman citizens to participate in the rites of foreign religions. When a cult was regarded as politically safe and as offering no menace to public morals, its adherents were in no imminent danger of hostile action by the state. But if for any reason they were suspected of disloyalty, or if their practices were thought detrimental to public welfare, an attempt at suppression might be momentarily expected.

When the Book of Revelation was written, Christians of Asia had fallen into disfavor with the authorities. Repressive measures had been enacted against the new religion, and its followers were living in lively expectation of still more drastic treatment in the near future. The situation is vividly depicted by John, who regards the imperial power as the special implement employed by Satan in his evil designs against the followers of Christ. What had brought about this hot outburst of fury against the Roman government, which was so generally tolerant of all the various religions of its subjects, not even excluding Judaism, to which

Christianity in its origin was closely akin? The answer to this question is furnished by that new religious phenomenon of imperial times known as emperor-worship.

IV. EMPEROR-WORSHIP IN ASIA

Long before the rise of the Roman Empire worship of rulers was a well-established custom in the eastern Mediterranean World. The picturesque figure of Alexander the Great readily invited divine honors similar to those which had been freely rendered to oriental monarchs for centuries before Alexander made himself master of Western Asia and Egypt. His phenomenal success easily led to the belief that he had been divinely chosen to establish Greek rule throughout the world, and as the vicegerent of heaven he might fittingly receive the worshipful adoration of his subjects. The tendency to deify him, already in evidence during his lifetime, came to fuller expression after his death. Not only was Alexander worshiped as a god, but his successors ruling in Egypt, Syria, and Macedonia were accorded similar honors.

Rome entered the political arena of the East in the rôle of liberator of the Greeks. At first victorious Roman generals and later even

proconsuls were hailed as savior deities by the grateful provincials. It soon became an established custom, especially in the province of Asia, to worship the representatives of the Roman government by erecting temples and instituting sacrifices in their honor. The faith of the provincials also created a new goddess called Roma, who personified for them the new political powers of their conquerors and occupied a position in their faith similar to that of a divine queen in the worship of oriental monarchs. A temple dedicated to Roma was erected at Smyrna in 195 B.C., and during subsequent years she became a popular goddess in various Eastern cities.

With the establishment of the imperial régime under Augustus, worship of the Roman power received fresh stimulus. In the year 29 B.C. he granted the provinces of Asia and Bithynia permission to dedicate at their two chief cities, Ephesus and Nicea, temples for the joint worship of the goddess Roma and the deceased Julius Caesar. Roman citizens residing in these regions were instructed to render due worship at these new shrines. To the residents of the provinces who had not acquired the rank of Roman citizenship Augustus granted the priv-

ilege of erecting temples for the joint worship of the goddess Roma and himself at Pergamum in Asia and at Nicomedia in Bithynia. Subsequently similar shrines were established at many places, but the goddess Roma gradually disappeared, while the worship of both dead and living emperors became increasingly popular with the provincials.

The Senate and people of Rome were more reserved in their adoption of emperor-worship. While the Senate freely authorized imperial cults for the provinces, in Rome itself official deification was reserved for deceased emperors. Yet even in Rome popular fancy far outran official action in respect to the worship of both living and deceased rulers. Even before Julius Caesar was assassinated he had been regarded as a divinity by the admiring populace, and his formal apotheosis by the Senate a few months after his death was but a tardy confirmation of popular belief. But, remembering the price Caesar had paid for his too great popularity, Augustus and his successors usually discouraged the people of Rome from rendering divine honors to living emperors. Zealous support, however, was given to the worship of those deceased rulers whose apotheosis had been

officially decreed by the Senate, and the cult of the reigning emperor was heartily approved as a legitimate and desirable form of worship for provincials.

During the latter part of the first century A.D., when Christianity was gaining a foothold in Asia, emperor-worship must have been a familiar fact in all the more important cities and in many of the smaller towns of the province. At various places temples had been erected in honor of successive generations of ruling emperors, whose cults still survived even after the individual ruler's death. These temples, constantly increasing in number, were supported at the public expense, and associated with them were priests, keepers, guards, singers, or other attendants, who administered the rites of the cult with fitting ceremonies well calculated to impress the public.

In the provinces there were two main types of emperor-worship, one known as the *municipal* cult and the other as the *provincial*. It was a common practice for different municipalities to establish on their own initiative and to maintain at their own expense religious rites in honor of the various emperors, both during their lifetime and after their death. Frequently the wor-

ship of the ruler would be associated with that of some local god, the emperor supplementing or supplanting the deity as the city's benefactor or savior. Apparently the municipal cult of the emperor received no official approval or authorization either from the emperor, the Senate, or the governor. It seems to have been entirely under the control of local authorities, who built the temple, appointed the festivals, supported the priests, and attended to all other matters pertaining to the conduct of the worship. It is not improbable, however, that the governor of a province, or his agents, would exercise a certain degree of unofficial supervision with a view to insuring a proper respect and fitting pomp in the observance of the rites.

On the other hand a provincial cult of the emperor could not be established without the official consent of Rome. The initiative was taken by the province, but an imperial authorization had to be obtained before the provincials could build a temple or institute a cult in honor of any particular emperor. A provincial assembly composed of delegates from the various cities and convening at stated periods had as one of its duties the care of the imperial cult of the province. To this council the

emperors gave permission from time to time for the establishment of their worship at various places in Asia. The first city to be honored with a provincial cult of a living emperor was Pergamum, where worship of Augustus was officially instituted in the year 29 B.C. This fact gave the city a certain prestige, in which it took no little pride, but for the same reason to the author of Revelation Pergamum was notorious as the abode of Satan's seat.

Before the close of the first century A.D. many cities of Asia had been given permission to establish provincial cults of the emperors, and could boast the possession of magnificent temples in their honor. At times it appears to have been customary to designate a certain city as official temple-keeper, making it temporarily the religious capital of the province. At least once during the first century A.D. this honor had been bestowed variously upon Pergamum, Ephesus, and Smyrna—a significant testimony to their zeal for worshiping the ruler. Each sanctuary was presided over by a chief priest elected by the provincial assembly, while the president of the assembly bore the dignified title of "high priest of Asia." Neither these officials nor the provincial council itself pos-

sessed any judicial powers, yet their prestige in the community was very great. Even a Roman governor avoided offending these provincial dignitaries, and it must have been a very simple matter for officials of the imperial cult to procure effective judicial action against any members of the community who, like the Christians, failed to show proper respect for the popular imperial cult.

It is perfectly apparent, however, that the imperial cult did not generally assume a hostile attitude toward its predecessors. Whether in its municipal or in its provincial form, emperor-worship never demanded the exclusive allegiance of its devotees. It arose as a supplement and not as a rival of other religions. Worship rendered to the emperor did not imply any breach in one's allegiance to Zeus, Artemis, or any other ancient deity. For pagan thinking, the deified ruler belonged in the company of the well-known gods of antiquity, who lived agreeably among themselves, and shared amicably the devotions of the same worshiping communities.

Moreover, emperor-worship did not originate in the imperial palace. Although it early assumed the character of an official state cult,

it was not in the first instance forced upon the provincials by formal imperial decree, nor was it conducted under direct state supervision. On the contrary it arose spontaneously, inspired by the provincials' gratitude to Rome and admiration for her rulers, who had brought order and stability into the chaos of preceding years. Loyal performance of the rites of the new religion was a matter of local or provincial pride rather than an official requirement of the state. To be sure, the emperors encouraged this form of religion, the wiser rulers appreciating its value as a stimulus to patriotism, while others used it to sate their vanity. But the real vitality of the cult was due to the provincials, who of their own accord established temples, conducted the worship, and supplied the missionary zeal necessary to insure the success of the new religion.

After the imperial cult became established in the popular esteem of the community, the only demand it made upon the devotees of other gods was additional worship of the emperor. Refusal to conform to this popular demand might readily be interpreted as disloyalty to the state, but this situation caused pagans no trouble. They had no scruples

against adding worship of the emperor to their previous devotions. Jews, on the other hand, refused outright to render divine honors to any pagan deities, much less to the Roman emperor. Yet even in their case this refusal involved no permanently serious consequences. Toward the close of his reign Caligula, the first emperor to press worship of himself upon his subjects, carried on a bloody persecution against the Jews of Alexandria, and decreed that his image should be placed in the Temple at Jerusalem. But his successor, Claudius, sent an edict to the governor of Egypt approving of the Jews' unwillingness to call the emperor a god, and granting them full liberty to maintain their own religious customs without molestation. Similar instructions were issued for all the provinces, and no further attempt was ever made to force emperor-worship upon the Jews. Their unwillingness to take part in the rites of the state cult was treated by the emperors as a purely religious scruple, and not as an evidence of disloyalty. Since their attitude was a traditional inheritance antedating the rise of emperor-worship, it was accepted as an essential item of Jewish national faith, which the Romans had no intention of abolishing.

V. THE SITUATION OF THE CHRISTIANS

As compared with Judaism, Christianity was much less favorably situated. Emperor-worship and Christianity were not only two of the latest arrivals among the various religions of Asia; they were also irreconcilable competitors. Several years passed before the two religions came to an open conflict. Perhaps because of Christianity's relatively scanty following and its close genetic kinship to Judaism, at first little or no attention was paid to the aversion of its followers for the ceremonies of the imperial cult. But a gradual increase in numbers and a growing dislike for the new sect on the part of both Jews and pagans ultimately resulted in serious trouble for the officials of the state worship. Christians followed the precedent of the Jews in refusing to participate in the rites of the imperial cult, but they could not establish a similar claim to immunity. Christianity was not an ancient national faith entitled to recognition among the long-established religions. On the contrary it was a new sect, entirely lacking in prestige, and of even more recent origin than the worship of the emperors.

There is much uncertainty about the exact circumstances under which Christians were first

compelled to declare themselves on the question of emperor-worship. The initial move against them is not likely to have come from the Senate, the emperor, or even from the governor of the province. It is far more probable that their nonconformity was first noted and magnified by zealous devotees or priests, of either the municipal or the provincial imperial cult, in certain localities where the worship of the emperor was especially popular. These religious enthusiasts endeavored, and apparently with some degree of success in the province of Asia in John's day, to procure a suitable form of judicial condemnation for Christians as alleged offenders against the good order and safety of society and the state.

The forces combining to call forth hostile action against the Christians are easily discernible. First, the Jews were Christianity's hereditary enemies, and it is not surprising that, whenever opportunity offered, devout Jews lent their aid to suppress the new rival religion. From the Jewish point of view there were ample grounds to justify this hostility. The new movement had caused certain of their kinsmen to apostatize from the true faith of their fathers by adopting Christianity. It had also drawn

away certain Gentiles who by their former attendance upon the services of the synagogue had constituted a body of prospective proselytes. Even more aggravating was the fact that the Christians claimed to be the sole perpetuators of true Jewish religion and the only correct interpreters of the Jewish Scriptures. But to pious Jews the very use of the Scriptures in these mixed Christian communities, composed of apostate Jews and sinful Gentiles, seemed a gross defilement of the sacred writings. Under these circumstances it was to be expected that the Jews of the Dispersion would endeavor, by every possible means and probably in all good conscience, to impede the progress of the Christian movement.

While the Jews were usually unable of themselves to cause Christians serious trouble, it was possible for them to occasion the advocates of the new religion a great deal of inconvenience by arousing the suspicions of the Gentiles. Paul seems to be speaking of a typical experience when he writes to the Thessalonians that the Jews "drove us out and please not God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved."[1]

[1] I Thess. 2:15 f.; cf. II Cor. 11:24.

And the history of the Christian mission among Gentiles as described in the Book of Acts is one constant experience of Jewish counter-agitation in an effort to arouse the animosity of the heathen.[1] When attempting to awaken gentile hostility, the most effective accusation to lodge against Christians was that they were dangerous to the state. It was on this charge that Jesus' enemies had procured his condemnation, and a similar accusation was probably preferred against his followers at various times in the early history of the movement. Undoubtedly the Jews of Asia in John's day either had instigated or had substantially aided the gentile persecution, for which he roundly denounces them as no longer genuine Jews but members of a synagogue of Satan.[2] Undoubtedly Jewish hostility was a disturbing fact with which Christians had constantly to reckon in every city of the province of Asia.

Popular gentile feeling toward Christianity had become similarly antagonistic. The Thessalonian converts were not exceptional in experiencing persecution from their countrymen

[1] E.g., Acts 13:50; 14:2, 19; 17:5 ff., 13; 18:12 f.; 21:27 ff.; 23:12 ff.; 25:7 ff.

[2] Rev. 2:9; 3:9.

similar to that which Jewish Christians had endured at the hands of their kinsmen.[1] There was ample basis for this gentile hostility. At the outset the heathen populace scarcely distinguished Christians from Jews, hence Christianity inherited the popular disfavor that already attached to Judaism. But even after Christianity won recognition as a separate religion, it continued for many years to be regarded by Gentiles as an undesirable oriental cult. Wherever it entered pagan society its influence seemed utterly disturbing and divisive. A convert to this new faith could no longer participate whole-heartedly in the established conventions of pagan family life. He became a negligible, if not indeed an actually disturbing, factor in the customary activities of the gentile community. If he were a zealous Christian of the primitive type, he withdrew his patronage from the public festivals, he ceased to be a customer of the image-maker, he no longer purchased victims for the sacrifice, and in general he made himself a voluntary outcast from pagan society.

This negative attitude toward established customs was frequently supplemented by a

[1] I Thess. 2:14.

vigorous polemic against the existing social and religious order. The gods of the heathen were declared to be no gods, but only evil demons, and their beautiful images everywhere in evidence were denounced as dead and worthless idols of wood or metal or stone, owing their existence to no higher authority than the creative skill of human hands. Christian invective was usually not content with merely denouncing heathen religion. The whole course of pagan life was included in its condemnation. Enthusiasts of John's temper, and doubtless there were many such in the early days, regarded the entire range of gentile life as fundamentally a product of Satanic activity. Religion, culture, commerce, and all pleasures of pagan society were uniformly declared to be works of Satan which every true Christian would eschew while patiently awaiting the early return of Christ to destroy utterly the present evil world and inaugurate a new heavenly régime in which none save Christians would participate.

The gentile populace, believing that it had sufficient provocation to justify its violent hatred of the early Christians, frequently acted upon its convictions. Sometimes this hostility

expressed itself in the form of violence by the mob, while at other times it sought satisfaction by instigating the municipal or imperial authorities to set in motion some more regular legal process against the Christians. How far sweeping accusations to the effect that the new religionists were criminals in general, or that they perpetrated gross crimes in their secret meetings, were effective in securing a verdict of guilty in the courts is quite uncertain. Probably the outcome of a trial would frequently depend very largely upon local conditions. But when the custom of worshiping the emperor became sufficiently popular to be taken seriously by the authorities, and when it became generally known that Christians would neither call Caesar Lord nor offer incense before his image, the possibility of securing a legal condemnation of Christians was greatly increased.

This was the new and crucial situation that confronted John. The aggressive hostility of the imperial cult was the danger that loomed largest on his horizon. Already Christian blood had been shed at Pergamum, the first official seat of emperor-worship. In this dwelling-place of Satan, as John terms it, Antipas had held fast the name of Christ, and had paid for his

loyalty with his life. Christians of Smyrna, another important center of the imperial cult, are told that presently they will be cast into prison, and some of their number will be "faithful unto death." John believes that an hour of testing is about to come for the peoples of the Roman Empire generally, when a sharp distinction will be drawn between those who consent and those who refuse to worship the head of the imperial régime.

As stated by John, the crucial question at issue is primarily that of willingness or unwillingness to worship the emperor, figuratively described as the "Beast." Humanity falls into just two classes, namely the great majority who yield to the demands of the imperial priest and worship at the emperor's shrine, and the small minority who acknowledge worshipful allegiance to Christ only. The deluded pagans revere the beast and affirm that he has neither rival nor superior. No one is like him, and no one is able to war with him.[1] The helpless saints are his victims, as he punishes them for refusal to acknowledge his alleged supremacy, and the priest of the imperial cult is so powerful that he is able to bring about the death of

[1] Rev. 13:4.

those who will not submit to his demands. This is the distinctive character of the struggle which John sees already begun in his day, and which he thinks will proceed to its deadly issue in the near future. The eternal destiny of men hangs upon their consent or their refusal to worship the beast or his image, receiving his mark or his number stamped upon their forehead or their hand.[1]

John's picture of the future reeks with the blood of Christians to be slaughtered for their refusal to render divine honors to the ruler who personifies the imperial Roman power. Underneath the altar in heaven John sees in his vision the souls of those who have been killed for their faith, and who there await the coming of their fellow-servants and brethren yet to be slain.[2] The heavenly choir hymns the praises of those faithful souls who choose death with loyalty to Christ rather than life upon earth under the rule of Rome. Killing with the sword is to be the characteristic activity of the imperial power in its treatment of the Christians, but a blessing is pronounced upon all those who thus "die in the Lord." So reck-

[1] Rev. 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:10; 19:20; 20:4.

[2] Rev. 6:9–11.

lessly will Rome pour out the blood of Christians that she will become drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. Finally, the millennial kingdom will be populated by those who have been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus, and who have refused to participate in the rites of the imperial cult.[1]

The enemy whom John dreads is not so much a particular emperor as it is the imperial Roman power, of which the emperor and his priests are concrete personifications. And Rome itself is not a primary agent, but is the instrument of Satan, who employs the imperial régime for carrying out his destructive designs upon the Christians. In John's thinking Satan, the devil, and the great dragon are only different terms for designating the same hostile demonic power which is ultimately responsible for the present agitation in favor of emperor-worship.[2] The climax of distress is to be reached under the last emperor, second in line of succession from the ruler in power when John writes.[3] He and his zealous priests, who will force the imperial cult upon all the inhabitants of the earth,

[1] Rev. 12:11; 13:9 f., 15; 14:13; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 20:4.
[2] Rev. 12:9, 17; 13:2. [3] Rev. 17:10 f.

are both "beasts" and unique incarnations of demonic wickedness.

VI. TIME OF WRITING

At what period in their history were the Christians of Asia confronted by the situation which the Book of Revelation depicts? To be sure, they had always been objects of popular suspicion and hatred on the part of their Jewish and gentile contemporaries, but during the early years of their activity they had not come into any sharp or persistent conflict with the Roman officials. In fact the Roman government had occasionally proved itself a real protection for Christians when threatened by the hatred of the populace. Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, had refused to prosecute Paul on the charges preferred by the Jews of Corinth.[1] Again, Roman intervention saved Paul from the violence of the mob on the occasion of his last visit to Jerusalem. If pressed to philosophize on the subject, Paul and his companions would probably have said that the imperial régime was essentially a Satanic affair, an institution of this present evil world, destined for ultimate destruction by the coming Messiah,

[1] Acts 18:12 ff.

though temporarily it was a form of control ordained by God for the well-being of this transient evil age. Christians were admonished to obey Rome, regarding its political supremacy as a real protection, a minister of God to them for good.[1]

In the Book of Revelation the trustful attitude of Christians toward the Roman state, as exemplified by Paul, gives place to a feeling of grave suspicion and hot protest. The imperial power itself has now become the Christians' most dreaded foe. What events brought about this change of sentiment? Nero's procedure against Christians is the first known act of imperial hostility toward the new religion. In the year 64 A.D. a large part of the city of Rome was destroyed by fire, with great loss to life and property. Popular report accused Nero himself of having caused the destruction, in order that he might rebuild the city in greater magnificence. At this rumor he became very much alarmed, and vainly sought various means of diverting suspicion from himself. Finally he hit upon the plan of laying the blame upon the Christians, who by this time had become sufficiently prominent in Rome to incur the dislike

[1] Rom. 13:1–7.

of the pagan populace. The Roman historian Tacitus describes the incident as follows:

Hence, to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of that name, was put to death as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius. But the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also, whither all things horrible and disgraceful flow from all quarters as to a common receptacle and where they are encouraged. Accordingly, first those were seized who confessed they were Christians. Next, on their information a vast multitude were convicted, not so much on the charge of burning the city as of hating the human race. And in their deaths they were also made the subjects of sport, for they were covered with the hides of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs, or nailed to crosses, or set fire to, and when day declined burned to serve for nocturnal lights. Nero offered his own gardens for that spectacle and exhibited a Circensian game, indiscriminately mingling with the common people in the habit of a charioteer, or else standing in his chariot. Whence a feeling of compassion arose toward the sufferers, though guilty and deserving to be made examples of by capital punishment, because they seemed not to be cut off for the public good, but victims to the ferocity of one man.[1]

[1] Tacitus *Annals* xv. 44; cf. Suetonius *Nero* 16.

To what extent Nero indulged in his cruel sport at the Christians' expense during the remainder of his reign, which ended in 68 A.D., is not definitely known. Christian tradition reports that both Peter and Paul met their death in the Neronian persecutions. At the close of the first century in a letter from the Roman to the Corinthian church, after referring to the death of these two illustrious pioneers, the writer adds:

> Unto these men of holy lives was gathered a vast multitude of the elect, who through many indignities and tortures, being the victims of jealousy, set a brave example among ourselves. By reason of jealousy women being persecuted, after they suffered cruel and unholy insults as Danaids and Dircae, safely reached the goal in the race of faith and received a noble reward, feeble though they were in body.[1]

Apparently this language harks back to the sufferings imposed upon the Christians of Rome in the time of Nero. These experiences must have proved a rude awakening for many Christians who had previously looked upon Rome as at least indifferent if not actually friendly toward their cause. There is no evidence, however, that Nero's hostility reached beyond the city of Rome, for the emperor's concern was in

[1] I Clement *Cor.* 6.

a distinctly local situation. But undoubtedly accounts of the atrocities committed in the capital were dramatically reported by survivors, who quickly spread the news to all parts of early Christendom, thus winning for Nero immortal fame as the first imperial persecutor of the new religion.

Despite his reputation as a foe of Christianity, Nero does not seem to have been primarily interested in crushing Christianity as a religion. Christians were proceeded against simply on the basis of popular animosity. There is no intimation that Nero was persecuting them specifically on account of their faith, or that his object was in any sense either remedial or punitive. He neither sought to make them abandon their religion, nor did he persecute them for refusal to give allegiance to any form of worship sanctioned by the government. The sole basis of his action was the alleged crime of incendiarism, and he apparently chose the Christians in preference to any other sect because they seemed to him to be the most unpopular, and so to serve his purpose best. In reality he was not deliberately persecuting a religious movement; he was merely making scapegoats of a much-disliked element in Roman

society. Moreover, it seems altogether probable that Christians were condemned without fair trial, or perhaps even without the pretense of a hearing, popular prejudice being regarded as adequate evidence of their criminality.

In the Book of Revelation the imperial menace to Christianity appears in a much more advanced stage of development. Persecution no longer centers upon the Christian community at Rome, but has extended to the province of Asia. The ground of hostility has also changed. Popular prejudice has not lessened, but Christians are no longer condemned on any merely general charge of criminality. They are prosecuted on distinctly religious grounds, more especially for their refusal to participate in the rites of emperor-worship. Already in some cases severe action has been taken against these religious recalcitrants, and John awaits with much alarm the inauguration of a still more persistent effort on the part of the Roman officials in Asia to force Christians to comply with the demand of the pagan religious leaders of the province who are enthusiastically devoted to the cult of the emperor.

John evidently assumes that court proceedings against Christians may be duly instituted

by local authorities and a condemnation secured on a charge of religious nonconformity. It should not be inferred, however, that the Roman authorities were as yet aiming at the complete extinction of Christianity. Apparently they were merely demanding that Christians reverence the national pagan deities and the deified emperor in particular. From the Christian standpoint compliance with this demand was synonymous with utter abandonment of their own faith, but the Romans probably had no such drastic intention, nor would they easily understand why religious loyalty to Caesar necessarily involved the Christian in disloyalty to his Christ. As John views the situation, the demand that Christians worship Caesar means utter apostasy from their own faith. But in all probability the Romans, accustomed as they were to the worship of different gods, had no thought of completely suppressing the Christian cult.

The situation of the Asian Christians as depicted in Revelation can be assigned with a high degree of probability to the latter part of the reign of Domitian, who was emperor from 81 to 96 A.D. As already observed, the conditions described by John differed widely from

those of Nero's time. Moreover, among Nero's successors Domitian was the first who is known to have stressed religious conformity and to have been solicitous for the recognition of his own divinity. Writing of this emperor, the Roman historian Cassius Dio[1] says:

> And the same year [95 A.D.] Domitian slew many others including even Flavius Clemens, the consul, though he was a cousin, and was married to Flavia Domitilla, herself a relative [niece] of Domitian. The charge brought against them both was atheism, under which many others who drifted into Jewish ways were condemned. Some were killed, and others were at least deprived of their property. But Domitilla was merely banished to Pandateria.

From the Roman point of view atheism would mean simply a refusal to worship the pagan gods, and the "Jewish ways" may well have been Cassius Dio's method of referring to the Christian movement. It was very easy for Gentiles to think of Christianity as an offshoot of Judaism even more worthy of condemnation than was the parent religion. The catacombs of Rome furnish additional data in support of the view that Flavia Domitilla was a Christian. As commonly interpreted, one inscription states that she had given a plot of ground to her

[1] lxvii. 14; cf. Suetonius *Domitian* 15.

freedmen and freedwomen of the Christian faith as a burying place for them and their descendants. Still another indication of Domitian's action against the Christians is contained in the so-called First Epistle of Clement. It refers to the unexpected calamities and disasters which have recently befallen the Christians of Rome in such rapid succession that they have been unable to give due attention to the Corinthians. At the earliest the letter can hardly have been written before the closing years of the first century A.D., and if composed at that time its references to recent troubles of Christians in Rome undoubtedly reflect conditions under Domitian.

Domitian was not only concerned to suppress "atheism," but he also encouraged the recognition of his own divinity, especially in the provinces. On receiving back his divorced wife he announced that he had recalled her to his *pulvinar*, which was the current term to designate the couch sacred to the image of the gods. He took pleasure in having the populace greet the royal pair in the amphitheater with the salutation "All hail to our lord and lady," and during his lifetime his own genius was included among the deities by whom oaths were

pledged. These vague implications of his divinity become explicit assertions in his instructions to his procurators. He informed them that the imperial orders given to the provincials were to open with the statement, "Our Lord and God commands thus and so." According to his biographer, Suetonius,[1] it henceforth became a rule that everyone, whether in writing or in speaking, address the emperor as Lord and God.

This religious situation provided a most appropriate setting for the procedure against the Christians of Asia as depicted in the Book of Revelation. Under these circumstances the representatives of the Roman state, even in the senatorial provinces, would undoubtedly be eager to cater to the vanity of their imperial master. The zeal of both civil and religious officials would be greatly stimulated by a knowledge of the emperor's desire for divine honors. Since the imperial cult was older and more firmly established in Asia than in any other province, the Christians of this territory were naturally the first to suffer most severely from this new type of imperial hostility. At the time John wrote the danger was already a reality.

[1] *Dom.* 13.

Perceiving the fatal possibilities of its further development he anticipated the early outbreak of a much more general persecution, designed to force Christians everywhere to worship the emperor.

The foregoing considerations fix within approximately narrow limits the date at which Revelation was written. The aggressive hostility of the imperial cult temporarily abated with the death of Domitian in 96 A.D. His successor Nerva (96–98 A.D.) inaugurated a distinctly reactionary policy, releasing those who were on trial for personal offenses against the dignity of the emperor (*majestas*) and restoring the exiles. He also prohibited accusations both for *majestas* and for "Jewish living," thus restraining the activities of delators whose practices Domitian had evidently encouraged. Under the next emperor, Trajan (98–117 A.D.), the persecution of Christians presents a notably different aspect from that of Domitian's time, as is well known from the extant correspondence between Trajan and Pliny while the latter was governor of Bithynia-Pontus. Hence the date of Revelation must be placed before the death of Domitian, which occurred September 18, 96 A.D. And since Domitian's religious megalo-

mania came to expression most definitely in the closing years of his principate it is very probable that the specific situation which called forth the Book of Revelation became acute at some time between the years 90 and 96 A.D.

This date for the writing of Revelation is corroborated by other sources of information. Although ancient Christian testimony on this point is not absolutely uniform, the earliest and most general opinion, first expressed near the close of the second century by Irenaeus, is to the effect that the book was written toward the close of the reign of Domitian. Furthermore the myth regarding Nero's return, which grew up in the generation following his death, had gained sufficiently wide currency to be used by John as a matter of general knowledge. He also refers to the successive princes of the imperial line in such a way as to suggest that his own activity falls within the reign of Domitian.[1] Efforts have been made to fix John's date more exactly by means of his reference to oil and wine in Rev. 6:6. If this remark was prompted by Domitian's edict ordering a reduction of the vineyards in the provinces, as some

[1] For a more extended exposition of John's references to the return of Nero and the succession of imperial rulers, see below, pp. 341 ff.

interpreters have surmised, John must have been writing after the year 92 A.D. It was in this year, according to Suetonius,[1] that the emperor issued a decree requiring the provincials to cut down at least half of their vines and prohibiting the planting of any new vines in Italy. That the residents of Asia would regard any such stricture as a serious hardship is suggested by the action of the provincial council of Asia in sending a representative to Domitian with a request that he rescind his order against the planting of vines in the province.[2] But on the whole it seems impracticable to attempt any more exact dating of Revelation than to say that the book was written at some time between the years 90 and 96 A.D.

VII. JOHN'S RESPONSE TO THE SITUATION

The status of the Asian Christians during the closing years of Domitian's reign set John his task. Although the specific demand calling forth his book was the menace of emperor-worship, nevertheless certain subsidiary needs of the time were also taken into account by John when he wrote. From his point of view

[1] *Dom.* 7 and 14.

[2] Philostratus *Lives of Sophists* I. xxi. 12.

the welfare of the Christians had been imperiled by a dangerous development of interest among some of them in worldly affairs. Therefore he takes occasion in his book to protest against the economic prosperity of the brethren and to condemn all commercial activities as belonging to the transient existence of this Satanic order, which is doomed to early destruction. John also feels called upon to protest against any compromising adjustments between Christianity and paganism. Those Christian teachers who are proposing a more liberal attitude toward gentile culture are denounced as false and unworthy of a place within Christianity. Generally speaking, John seems to feel keenly the necessity of supplying the Asian churches with exhortations that will serve as a moral and spiritual tonic.

But the greater and more crucial demand prompting the writing of the book was the rising menace of the imperial cult. Already Christians were suffering punishment for their refusal to worship the emperor, and John expects in the near future a still more emphatic and widespread insistence upon Christian conformity to this imperial demand. In imagination he sees the ancient and mighty Roman

Empire arrayed against the youthful and seemingly insignificant Christian movement. What is to be the outcome of the conflict? That Christianity should compromise with this heathen demand seemed to him out of the question; nor was there any hope of relief from a resort to physical force such as the Jews had attempted in their revolution against Rome. Physically the odds in favor of the Roman armies were altogether too great to justify the hope of a Christian triumph by any ordinary attempt at armed resistance. As John viewed the situation, a catastrophic intervention of heavenly powers offered the only possible hope of a Christian victory. God must intervene and that right early to annihilate Satanic Rome and establish a new order of things upon earth. In the hour of distress and anxiety visions of this impending heavenly triumph inspired John with new courage to endure present afflictions, and his dominant motive in recording his visions was a desire to inspire in his fellow-sufferers a similar courage. The Book of Revelation was composed to meet this pressing demand of the hour.

CHAPTER II

TYPICAL REVELATIONS

John and his companions in trouble were not the first persons in the ancient world to fee the need of a special revelation, nor were theyl the first to have their need satisfied. In former times of distress men of vision had ventured to peer into the secrets of heaven and had written out accounts of their visions for the admonition or encouragement of their contemporaries. A document thus produced is commonly called a revelation, or, to use the Greek derivative, an apocalypse. Apocalypses constitute a distinct type of religious literature, once popular among both Jews and Christians, and not entirely unknown to Gentiles.

It is no longer customary to write apocalypses, nor is it easy for moderns to understand this antiquated type of literature. But with John and his readers the situation was quite different. Christians who had been reared in Judaism were familiar with apocalypses which had been written to meet various crises in the history of the Jews. These documents

continued in use among early Christians, who also introduced them to their gentile converts. To some extent Gentiles, even before coming into contact with either Judaism or Christianity, were also familiar with apocalyptic wisdom. On occasion pagan seers, believing that they had extracted secrets from the world beyond, revealed them to mortals for their enlightenment and edification. That Christians preserved a keen interest in this form of writing is further shown by the new Christian apocalypses which arose during the first and second centuries A.D. As a result of this situation John and his Christian contemporaries were well prepared by custom and interest to recognize the value of a new Christian apocalypse for use in the hour of their special need. But a modern reader can learn to share their feeling only by acquainting himself with the apocalyptic writings current in that ancient world.

I. APOCALYPTIC FEATURES IN THE PROPHETS

In the Bible which Christians took over from Judaism there were numerous examples of apocalyptic style. In moments of high emotional stress the prophets occasionally presented their message in pictorial fashion as a

special revelation communicated to them in visions. Certain portions of the prophetic warnings of Amos belong in this class of writing. Once he saw a devouring fire, typical of the destruction that awaited the unrepentant Israelites. Then he beheld the Lord holding a plumbline beside a wall, and heard him exclaim, "I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel. I will not again pass by them any more." Another vision seen by Amos is that of a basket of picked fruit, to which Jehovah calls his attention, announcing that "the end is come upon my people Israel. I will not again pass by them any more."[1]

A more highly colored apocalyptic passage occurs in Isaiah. In the year of King Uzziah's death Isaiah was prompted to enter upon his prophetic work by a vision of God enthroned in the Holy of Holies. As the seraphim hymned the majesty of Jehovah, Isaiah was overcome with the consciousness of his own and his contemporaries' uncleanness. But when his lips had been purged by the touch of a coal taken from the altar, he responded to the divine summons and received his commission to become a prophet, communicating the message of

[1] Amos 7:4–9; 8:1 f.

the Lord to the people.[1] Thus not the full content of Isaiah's preaching, but the fundamental inspiration for his work, is represented as the direct result of a special revelation made to him at that critical juncture in the history of the nation marked by the death of the king.

Ezekiel is a conspicuous example of a prophet who delivers his message under the inspiration of revelatory visions. His book opens with the following description of the author's equipment: "Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God." The first vision was that of four winged creatures, bearing the likeness of a man, but each with four faces, one of a man, one of a lion, one of an ox, and one of an eagle. These were marvelously brilliant beings glowing like coals of fire and moving with the rapidity of lightning. They were accompanied by mysterious wheels, with high and dreadful rims full of eyes, and the spirit of the winged creatures was in the wheels. And when they flew, the noise of their wings was "like the noise of great waters, like

[1] Isa. 6:1–13.

the voice of the Almighty, a noise of tumult like the noise of a host."

Above these creatures Ezekiel saw the vision of a terrifying, crystal-like firmament, supporting a throne resembling in magnificence a sapphire, and upon the throne sat the glory of Jehovah, anthropomorphically manifest, yet glowing like a mass of molten metal and brilliant as the splendor of the rainbow. In the presence of this gorgeous display the prophet falls upon his face, but is immediately ordered to arise, is himself filled with the Spirit, and is given his commission to preach to the people. The divine message is absorbed into his system by eating a book-roll given to him by the hand of God. This roll written on both sides contains the story of lamentation, mourning, and woe which he is to communicate unto the house of Israel.

Ezekiel represents himself as subject to visions and revelations, and much of his message is apocalyptic in form. One such striking section of his book is his description of the Temple in the new Jerusalem, to which the weary exiles are promised a return. Ezekiel specified the year, the month, and the very day of the month when the hand of Jehovah came upon him and in a vision carried him into the

land of Israel, where he witnessed an apparition of the new city and was visited by a heavenly being who conveyed to him full particulars regarding the measurements and equipments of the new temple. The prophet is expressly admonished:

> Son of man, behold with thine eyes and hear with thine ears and set thy heart upon all that I shall show thee, for to the intent that I may show them unto thee art thou brought hither. Declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel.[1]

Christians who had read Ezekiel would be well prepared to hear many things that might otherwise have seemed strange to them in John's apocalypse. John in the Spirit, witnessing visions of heaven and communicating his experience to his afflicted companions, plays a rôle not unlike that of Ezekiel equipped for his work by visions described in the most extravagant imagery imaginable to eye or ear.

Other apocalyptic passages in the prophets give less attention to the experiences of the seer, but stress more particularly the content of the apocalyptic message. John was not the first writer to disclose God's program with reference to impending events of unusual im-

[1] Ezek. 40:4.

portance. The agonies of the last times, the destruction of sinners, the enactment of judgment, the allotment of future rewards and punishments, and other critical happenings of cosmic importance were themes that earlier religious writers had often discussed. The details of earlier descriptions needed considerable interpretation before they could be made to fit the immediate needs of John and his readers, but the belief that God from time to time disclosed his intentions in apocalyptic pronouncements was thoroughly established long before the New Testament apocalypse appeared, and various examples of this literature were undoubtedly known to John and his fellow-Christians.

In the books of the prophets early Christians might read many an illustrative apocalyptic utterance disclosing Jehovah's intention of smiting sinners with disaster and dealing mercifully with the righteous. Of different passages in the Book of Isaiah, the description of Edom's doom and Israel's reward[1] is typical:

> Come near ye nations and hear, and hearken, ye peoples . . . . for Jehovah hath indignation against all the nations and wrath against all their host. . . . .

[1] Chaps. 34 f.

Their slain also shall be cast out, and the stench of their dead bodies shall come up, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood. And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll. . . . . For my sword hath drunk its fill in heaven. Behold it shall come down upon Edom and upon the people of my curse to judgment.

But for Jehovah's own people "the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose . . . . and the ransomed of Jehovah shall return and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." In a similar vein but under changed conditions John describes the impending vengeance of God upon the Romans and the rewards in store for the persecuted Christians.

The prophecy of Joel[1] also contains some striking apocalyptic descriptions portraying the coming of a great and terrible day of Jehovah, when marvelous things shall occur in heaven and earth. Men will witness "blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood." In

[1] Joel 2:28—3:17.

the valley of Jehoshaphat all the nations will be assembled for judgment as Jehovah exclaims, "Put ye in the sickle for the harvest is ripe. Come tread ye for the winepress is full, the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great." As the time of the great assize approaches, the light fades from sun and moon and the stars cease to shine. When Jehovah utters his thunderous voice from Zion all creation trembles as with a mighty earthquake, but his own people, the children of Israel, will hail his advent with joy, knowing that he is their God who has come to dwell with them in Zion and to deliver their holy city forever from the power of its foes.

II. THE BOOK OF DANIEL

In the Book of Daniel, Old Testament apocalyptic appears in fully developed form. Daniel was written at a very critical moment in Jewish history, and in its day was designed to serve a function similar to that for which John in his day wrote Revelation. During the first half of the second century B.C. Palestine was under the rule of the Hellenistic kings of Syria, who had recently wrested this territory from the Ptolemies of Egypt. The Syrian ruler,

Antiochus IV, surnamed Epiphanes, who reigned from 175 to 164 B.C., determined to force Hellenistic customs upon the Jews in order that Palestine might be thoroughly assimilated into the Syrian kingdom. Antiochus sought to accomplish this end by the complete suppression of the Jewish religion and the forcible imposition of Syrian religious rites upon the Jews. Jewish worship was forbidden, and Jewish religious practices such as Sabbath observance and circumcision were prohibited on pain of death. Heathen altars were established throughout the country, and the Jews were ordered to offer sacrifices. On the altar of burnt offering in the temple inclosure in Jerusalem an altar to Zeus was erected, and on December 25, 168 B.C., this sacred spot was further desecrated by the sacrifice of a sow. Thus began a life-and-death struggle which at first threatened the extermination of the Jewish people, though ultimately it issued in their political independence after a generation of bloody conflict.

The Book of Daniel arose during the early stages of this conflict, probably in 167 B.C., when the sorely oppressed Jews needed a special revelation of this type to comfort them in

affliction and give them a confident outlook upon the future. Instead of writing in his own name, the unknown author pictures Daniel as a seer of ancient times living a model life under similarly distressing circumstances and seeing in his visions the favorable outcome of the trying experiences through which the Jews were to pass in later years at the time when the book was actually written. The scene is laid in Babylonia at the court of the king during the Exile. In the midst of heathen surroundings Daniel and three of his companions order their lives strictly according to the requirements of the Jewish law, and God rewards their fidelity by granting them superior powers both physically and mentally. Daniel in particular is endowed with ability to foresee future events and reveal the purposes of God.

Daniel's supernatural wisdom was first put to the test when King Nebuchadnezzar demanded that his wise men tell him both the content and the interpretation of a recent dream which had caused him much annoyance. The wise men protested against so unreasonable a demand. They might have attempted an interpretation, but to be required to divine the content of the dream itself seemed to them beyond all

possibility. Their failure gave Daniel his opportunity. In answer to prayer God rewarded the piety of Daniel by revealing to him in a vision both the content and the meaning of the king's dream. When admitted into the presence of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel informed him that the king had beheld in his dream a gigantic image, the head composed of gold and the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet of clay mingled with iron. These four constituent elements represent four successive empires, and the destruction of the image by a great stone which smote it upon its brittle feet was typical of the overthrow awaiting the last of these four empires. The golden head was the kingdom of Babylon, which was presently to give place to the less glorious kingdom of the Medes. They in turn were to be supplanted by the Persians. The fourth kingdom was that of the Macedonians, strong like iron while Alexander lived, but crumbling like clay under his successors, and ultimately to perish by divine intervention.

The pious Jews, persecuted by Antiochus, were thus encouraged by the revelation of Daniel to believe that their deliverance was near at hand. If they followed the righteous

example of the seer, remaining loyal to their own religion even in the hour of severe persecution, they might momentarily expect a divine deliverance to be accomplished by the catastrophic action of Jehovah. He would completely crush all their enemies and establish for them his own eternal kingdom upon earth.

This hope is confirmed by all that follows in the Book of Daniel. The story of Daniel and his companions, divinely delivered from the fiery furnace into which they had been thrown because of their refusal to worship the image of Nebuchadnezzar, was designed to encourage Jews in their antipathy for the worship of Antiochus. When Nebuchadnezzar dreamed another dream, forewarning him of an approaching period of insanity to continue for seven years, Daniel again figured as an infallible interpreter. Readers were admonished to note that everything predicted by the seer was in strict accordance with divine revelation and always came to pass. Similarly Nebuchadnezzar's successor was informed that the handwriting on the wall meant the doom of his kingdom, and on that very night "Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain and Darius the Mede received the kingdom." When Darius,

manifestly foreshadowing Antiochus' efforts to force worship of himself upon the Jews, demanded that Daniel and his companions pray to the king only, their refusal was justified by their miraculous deliverance from the den of lions into which they had been thrown in punishment for their disobedience.

The latter half of the apocalypse of Daniel recounts a series of visions experienced by the seer at different times, but all having the same import. They are prophetic of the wonderful salvation which God is about to bestow upon his faithful people, delivering them from the persecution of the Syrian kings and inaugurating a new heavenly régime upon earth. In the first vision Daniel sees four beasts typical of the four kingdoms successively dominating the world until God intervenes to destroy all earthly empires. During the dominion of the last beast, symbolizing the ruling line to which Antiochus belongs, God is suddenly to appear in judgment, seated upon a flaming throne, from which streams of fire radiate in all directions. The heavenly host accompanying him numbers thousands of thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand. The books of heaven are opened, judgment is pronounced, the beast Antiochus is

slain, and his body is committed to the flames. After witnessing this judgment scene, Daniel's gaze is directed toward a heavenly apparition typifying the triumphant people of God. He beholds a figure descending upon the clouds of heaven, "one like unto a son of man," who approaches the throne of God and is given "dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."[1]

Another vision occurred two years later. Its meaning is explained to Daniel by the angel Gabriel, who informs him that the vision concerns the period of the indignation and the appointed time of the end. Although the apocalyptic writer represents the event as occurring in the third year of Belshazzar's reign, he finds its specific fulfilment in the experiences of his own day. Accordingly Daniel wonders at the vision, whose import no one at the time understood, for "it belongeth to many days to come." But in the light of subsequent history the figures seen by Daniel become clearly intelligible. The ram with two horns

[1] Dan. 7:13 f.

represent the Medes and Persians, and the goat arising from the west to supplant them is the victorious Alexander the Great. The four horns that displaced the original single horn of the goat typify the four rulers who divided the empire of Alexander among themselves after his death. And the king of fierce countenance who is to arise in the latter time of their kingdom is manifestly the persecutor Antiochus.

The apocalyptist seeks to give his readers further comfort by specifying more exactly the date of the expected deliverance. After a period of prayer Daniel is again visited by Gabriel, who informs him that the seventy years of Babylonian captivity predicted by Jeremiah really mean seventy weeks of years, that is, four hundred and ninety years, to elapse between the captivity and the inauguration of the new age. According to the chronology of the author, these seventy weeks of years fall into three subdivisions. Seven weeks (forty-nine years) are assigned to the Exile, and sixty-two weeks (four hundred and thirty-four years[1]) are allotted to the period from the return of the captives until the beginning of final distress. This period of

[1] Had the seer been an accurate chronologist rather than an apocalyptic visionary, he would have had to deduct sixty-eight years from this number.

final affliction is to endure one week (seven years), and in the middle of this period the persecutor "shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease."[1] Apparently the reference here is to Antiochus' desecration of the Temple in December, 168 B.C. Thus the apocalyptist expected the special intervention of God to occur three and one-half years from that date.

Daniel is granted yet another visit from the angel, who comes to reveal to him the secrets of heaven regarding God's plans for the future of the world. This revelation is placed in the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia. The seer learns that three more kings are to reign in Persia before the kingdom falls into the power of Alexander. The latter's dominions will soon be divided into four parts, with a strong branch in Egypt and another strong house ruling in Syria. The history of these two ruling lines, the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, is sketched down to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, whose wars with Egypt and persecution of the Jews are described in some detail. Antiochus' life is to end after another successful period of demon-like activity. While encamped between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean, after

[1] Dan. 9:27.

his triumph in Egypt, "he shall come to his end and none shall help him."

A brief period of intensified distress for the people of God is to follow, but, since the angel Michael is to champion their cause, deliverance is at hand. Salvation is granted to "every one that shall be found written in the book." Many of the dead will be raised, some participating in everlasting life, while others are subjected to shame and everlasting abhorrence. Daniel's curiosity about the date of the end is answered by Gabriel's solemn assurance that "from the time that the continual burnt offering shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days." That is, allowing for the insertion of one intercalary Jewish month, just three and one-half years will elapse. Again it would seem that the end of the old order was fixed for three and one-half years after December, 168 B.C., the date at which the sacrifices in the Temple had ceased and the altar to Zeus had been erected.

Such was the consolation offered by the author of Daniel to his afflicted contemporaries. Centuries later Christians, reading this book in the light of their own crushing experiences,

readily interpreted it as a promise of deliverance from their own woes. Thus they cultivated the apocalyptic temper which had in large measure equipped them to read and to appreciate the Revelation of John.

III. THE BOOK OF ENOCH

Several Jewish apocalypses which never found a place in the Old Testament were often highly prized and widely used by both Jews and Christians. The most important of these uncanonical apocalypses is the so-called Book of Enoch. In its present form it is composite, containing several different apocalypses which arose during the second and first centuries B.C. These documents, pseudonymously ascribed to the patriarch Enoch, represent the attempts of different authors to mediate information and help to their contemporaries by disclosing to them the content of numerous visions dealing with a variety of subjects.

In its present arrangement, which is probably the form in which it was read by early Christians, the book opens with Enoch's declaration that his eyes had been opened by God. The angels, who had shown him a vision of the Holy One in the heavens, explained everything

to him in order that he might record this wisdom, not for the people of his own generation, but for a remote age yet to come. The first item of information to be disclosed is that "the Holy Great One will come forth from his dwelling and the eternal God will tread upon the earth. . . . . Behold he cometh with ten thousands of his holy ones to execute judgment upon all and to destroy all the ungodly." While this is to be a time of trembling for sinners, the righteous have nothing to fear, since they will find mercy with God and will be established "in eternal gladness and peace all the days of their life."

The fate of the fallen angels is described at considerable length. Enoch in his visions beholds the place where they dwell in eternal imprisonment. In the course of his journeying under the escort of angels of light he is permitted to visit Sheol, to behold the luminaries of heaven, to view God's throne situated on one of seven magnificent mountains, and to look upon the tree of life which has been prepared for the enjoyment of the righteous after the final judgment. On returning to earth he gazes upon the blessed Jerusalem, situated upon the holy mountain, where joys await the faithful, and

beyond he sees the accursed valley where sinners are to be punished in the sight of the righteous.

In introducing his second vision, the apocalyptist informs his readers that "till the present day such wisdom has never been given by the Lord of Spirits as I have received according to my insight." The content of the vision is disclosed in a series of parables, each concerned chiefly with the impending destruction of evil and the triumph of righteousness. The first parable opens with a description of the coming judgment, when "sinners shall be judged for their sins and shall be driven from the face of the earth. . . . . It had been good for them if they had not been born." On the other hand the dwelling-place of the righteous is seen to be an abode of blessedness under the wings of the Lord of Spirits. The seer is quite overcome by the glory of the scene as he beholds the majesty of the Lord of Spirits who "knows before the world was created what is forever and what will be from generation unto generation. Those who sleep not bless thee, they stand before thy glory and bless, praise, and extol, saying Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Spirits. . . . . Blessed be thou and blessed be the name of the Lord forever and ever." In the presence of God

stand thousands of thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand angelic beings. The elect and holy among mortals are given mansions in heaven, but sinners who deny the name of the Lord of Spirits are dragged off to punishment.

The same theme is continued in the revelations of the second parable. Destruction is decreed for sinners, who shall not ascend into heaven; nor shall they be permitted to reside upon the earth. Presently God will send his Messiah to execute judgment and establish a new heaven and a new earth: "I will transform the heaven and make it an eternal blessing and light, and I will transform the earth and make it a blessing, and I will cause my elect ones to dwell upon it, but the sinners and evildoers shall not set foot thereon." Enoch is permitted to look upon the Messiah, now dwelling in heaven ready to descend to earth to enact judgment at the command of the Lord of Spirits. The seer is explicitly informed that "this Son of Man whom thou hast seen shall put down the kings and the mighty from their seats and shall loosen the reigns of the strong and break the teeth of the sinners."

In the meantime the righteous are slaughtered, but their prayer for vengeance will not

be in vain. The fountain of righteousness is inexhaustible, and the coming judgment to be inaugurated with the advent of the Son of Man will mean a complete vindication of the righteous. The dead also will be raised to share the blessings of the new age:

> In those days shall the earth also give back that which has been entrusted to it, and Sheol also shall give back that which it has received, and hell shall give back that which it owes. For in those days the Elect One [the Messiah] shall arise and he shall choose the righteous and holy from among them, for the day has drawn nigh that they should be saved. . . . . And in those days shall the mountains leap like rams, and the hills also shall skip like lambs satisfied with milk, and the faces of all the angels in heaven shall be lighted up with joy. And the earth shall rejoice, and the righteous shall dwell upon it, and the elect shall walk thereon.

The final scene in this picture is the attack of heathen powers upon the Messiah and his righteous companions. Evil angels will incite the Parthians and Medes to break forth as lions from their lairs and as hungry wolves among the flocks. They will invade Palestine, but on arriving before the Holy City they will be smitten by a mania for self-destruction. The slaughter will rage until corpses are

innumerable, and all their hosts will be swallowed up in Sheol, while the righteous gaze in safety upon the destruction of their enemies. Thereupon all the Jews of the Dispersion will return to Jerusalem in triumph from east, west, and south, wafted thither in a single day upon the winds of heaven.

The third parable also pictures the final judgment to be enacted by the Messiah. A rich blessing is pronounced upon the saints, who are promised an eternal life of righteousness in the presence of the Lord of Spirits. But terrible retribution will overtake sinners, particularly kings and those who exalt themselves among men. As the Messiah sits in judgment on his throne

> the word of his mouth slays all sinners and all the unrighteous are destroyed from before his face. . . . . And he will deliver them to the angels for punishment to execute vengeance on them because they have oppressed his children and his elect and they shall be a spectacle for the righteous and for his elect who shall rejoice over them because the wrath of the Lord of Spirits resteth upon them and his sword is drunk with their blood.

But the righteous shall abide eternally with God, and "with that Son of Man shall they eat and lie down and rise up forever and ever."

The third main division of Enoch reveals information about the heavenly bodies. This portion of the book admirably illustrates the belief of the ancients that astronomical as well as religious and historical wisdom could be obtained from apocalyptical writings. The same God who revealed the secrets of the future also disclosed to a worthy seer the secret of the sun's rising and setting and its course through the ecliptic. The changes in the moon, the length of the lunar year, the action of the winds, and other natural phenomena are all regarded as the proper subject-matter of revelation. The apocalyptist believes that the phenomena of nature and the activities of man are so inseparably linked together that man's sin seriously affects the welfare of the physical world, hence the coming change in the moral order involves a corresponding change in the whole material universe. The deeds of sinners result in such perversion of nature's powers that the years will be shortened, the fields will lack their usual fertility, the rains will be withheld, trees will refuse to yield their fruit, the moon will be irregular in its appearing, the sun will deviate from its course, and the stars will forsake their accustomed orbits.

If the moral and physical orders are thus closely related, Enoch may learn much that is of value for his purpose from the book of the courses of the luminaries of the heavens. Guided by an angelic interpreter the seer carefully observes the laws of these luminaries, and thereby acquires a knowledge of "how it is with regard to all the years of the world and unto eternity, till the new creation is accomplished which dureth till eternity." It was thought possible for ordinary men to forecast coming events from the signs of the times as manifest upon the face of nature, but one who was privileged to read the heavenly books upon this subject had an infallible source of information. Conscious of this superiority, Enoch affirmed:

> I observed the heavenly tablets and read everything which was written thereon and understood everything, and read the books of all the deeds of mankind and of all the children of flesh that shall be upon earth to the remotest generations.

A fourth section of the Enoch apocalypse contains an account of two dream-visions, disclosing the whole course of history from the deluge until the coming of the messianic age. The description follows historical lines down to the author's own day, which is about 150 B.C.

At that point the narrative takes on familiar apocalyptic colors. The Gentiles are to make a final assault upon the Jews. The fallen angels and other notable sinners are to be judged and condemned to the fiery abyss. The old Jerusalem is to be supplanted by a new city greater and loftier than the first. All Gentiles left upon the earth will voluntarily submit themselves to the Jews. The righteous dead will be raised, the Messiah will appear, and the new kingdom will be established.

The concluding chapters of Enoch are somewhat miscellaneous in content, but in general they continue to stress the rewards in store for the righteous and the adversities awaiting the wicked. Enoch admonishes his children:

> Let not your spirit be troubled on account of the times, for the Holy and Great One has appointed days for all things. . . . . And sin shall perish in darkness forever and shall no more be seen from that day for evermore.

The course of history from Adam to the founding of the messianic kingdom is briefly rehearsed in a vision covering ten world-weeks, the first extending from Adam to Enoch, the second ending with Noah, the third with Abraham, the fourth with Moses, the fifth with the building of the first Temple, the sixth with the

captivity, the seventh with the publication of this apocalypse. The eighth week is to see the establishment of the messianic kingdom, which is to endure until the end of the tenth week. Then will occur the final judgment, when the first heaven shall pass away and a new heaven appear.

After repeated pronouncements of doom upon sinners and of blessings upon the righteous, the book closes with an admonition to future generations not to pervert the seer's visions but to write down truthfully all his words in all languages. Sinners are warned against writing books to perpetuate their words, which alter and pervert the teachings of the righteous, but those writers who follow truthfully in the footsteps of the seer, neither altering nor detracting from his words, will produce books in which the righteous and wise will find cause for joy, uprightness, and much wisdom.

The Book of Enoch was popular among the early Christians, who found consolation in its promises of deliverance for the afflicted righteous. It is expressly cited in the Epistle of Jude as authority for believing in a judgment upon the ungodly. It is not at all improbable

that John and his readers would be familiar with this widely known Jewish book, which was early translated into different languages to meet the needs of a variety of readers. A better preparation for the understanding of John's book could hardly be imagined. A reading of Enoch would make one thoroughly familiar with the characteristic paraphernalia of apocalyptic. It stressed the necessity of faithfulness on the part of the righteous in times of sore affliction, it emphasized the superior wisdom of the apocalyptic seer who claimed to possess a supernatural knowledge received directly from heaven, it vividly described the punishment in store for sinners and the rewards to be inherited by the faithful, it depicted the terrors of the last times when even nature would writhe in agony, it pictured the triumphant glory of the heavenly Messiah descending to earth to slaughter his enemies, it promised the righteous membership in a blessed messianic kingdom to be realized in a new Jerusalem upon earth, it forecast the complete destruction of demonic powers, it expressed a firm belief in the resurrection of the dead, and it awaited the final revelation of a new heaven and a new earth. To read Enoch is to open up the whole field of

apocalyptic imagery upon which the author of the New Testament apocalypse freely drew.

IV. OTHER JEWISH APOCALYPSES

The writers of Daniel and Enoch had many successors who from time to time composed new apocalypses as new needs arose in the experiences of the Jewish people. These later authors followed the model of apocalyptic style set by the books of Daniel and Enoch, furnishing little that was new except fresh applications of this imagery to more recent events. A brief examination of certain special features in these writings may add a few significant items to one's preparation for the understanding of John's book.

Early in the first century A.D. the so-called Assumption of Moses appeared. Its form is that of an address delivered to Joshua by Moses before the departure of the latter from earth, and in content it is a revelation of the history of Israel from Moses' own day until the advent of the messianic kingdom. The purpose of the book is to protest against the diversion of Israel's interests into political channels and to encourage piety while awaiting the personal intervention of God on behalf of the righteous. Like his contemporaries, John the Baptist and

Jesus, the author evidently had no sympathy with the Zealots' ambition to instigate a revolt against Rome. On the contrary he advocated an attitude of patient endurance even to martyrdom, confident that God himself would vindicate the righteous when the time arrived for the establishment of the messianic kingdom. The description of events attending the end is characteristic.

The Heavenly One will arise from his royal throne and he will go forth from his holy habitation with indignation and wrath on account of his sons. And the earth shall tremble, to its confines shall it be shaken, and the high mountains shall be made low and the hills shall be shaken and fall. And the horns of the sun shall be broken and he shall be turned into darkness, and the moon shall not give her light and be turned wholly into blood. And the circle of the stars shall be disturbed. And the sea shall retire into the abyss and the fountains of waters shall fail and the rivers shall dry up. For the Most High will arise, the eternal God alone, and he will appear to punish the Gentiles and he will destroy all their idols. Then thou, O Israel, shalt be happy, and thou shalt mount upon the necks and wings of the eagle, and they shall be ended, and God will exalt thee. And he will cause thee to approach to the heaven of the stars . . . . and thou shalt look from on high and shalt see thy enemies in Gehenna, and thou shalt recognize them and rejoice, and thou shalt give thanks and confess thy creator.[1]

[1] *Asmp. M.* 10:3–10.

Another apocalyptic work composed by a Jew of Egypt during the first part of the first century A.D. is known as the Secrets of Enoch. It receives its name from the fact that it purports to disclose the secrets of God as revealed to Enoch. As the seer was led through the various heavens he beheld many wonderful things, among which were the punishments imposed upon sinners and the blessings awarded the righteous. In Paradise he found a wealth of sweet flowering trees, bearing an abundance of fragrant fruits. Towering above them all was the Tree of Life, magnificently adorned and yielding all manner of fruits. Out of the springs of Paradise flowed milk, honey, oil, and wine. The garden was kept by three hundred angels, who sang continually their sweet music, and every hour of every day served the Lord with never-silent voices. Such is the eternal inheritance of the righteous, who upon earth have endured all manner of offense from those that exasperate their souls, but who have walked without fault before the face of the Lord.

The abode of the wicked was also revealed to Enoch. It was a very terrible place filled with all manner of tortures and enshrouded in cruel darkness. Its only light was the murky

flames that shot aloft from the fiery pit in which sinners were suffering their punishment. Every form of suffering was there. Everywhere was fire, frost, ice, thirst, shivering. Fearful and merciless angels, equipped with angry weapons, added to the terrors of the place. Such were the torments in store for those who upon earth had dishonored God by their immoralities, magical practices, thefts, lies, calumnies, fornications, murders, oppressions of the poor, and idolatries.

On arriving in the tenth heaven, Enoch found himself in the very presence of God, who gave him instruction regarding the creation of the world. Each day of creation represents a thousand years of duration, so that at the end of seven thousand years a new and eternal world is to appear. The present age will close with a great judgment, after which there will be neither months nor days nor hours, but one eternal aeon to be inherited by the righteous, "and they will live eternally and then too there will be amongst them neither labor nor sickness nor humiliation nor anxiety nor need nor violence nor night nor darkness but great light."

After learning this divine wisdom Enoch was sent back to earth for thirty days to instruct

his children in the secrets of heaven, and to urge upon them the importance of living in the fear of the Lord. On completing his stay of thirty days upon earth, during which time he wrote three hundred and sixty-six books for the instruction of his sons, he was caught up again to the highest heaven, where he dwelt with God.

Other Jewish revelations, written at approximately the same time as John's book, further attest the prevalence of apocalyptic imagery in the religious thinking of that age. In the latter part of the first, or early in the second, century A.D. an Apocalypse of Abraham was written to explain the cause of suffering and encourage the hope of salvation. Abraham is instructed to make ready a sacrifice in preparation for a divine revelation regarding his descendants. Guided by the angel Jaoel, Abraham is carried to the celestial regions, where he beholds God upon his throne, surrounded by cherubim and other holy creatures. After revealing the secrets of heaven to Abraham, God promises him descendants as numerous and as powerful as the stars. He beholds the assembled Jewish people on God's right hand and the Gentiles on his left hand.

A vision of impending judgment reveals the punishment of the heathen who had slaughtered the people of God, burnt their temple, and plundered their holy place. The period of affliction is to endure "twelve years." Then will come the end of the ungodly age, when judgment will overtake the lawless heathen. A brief period of aggravated distress will precede the end, when all the creatures of the earth will be smitten with ten plagues. The first is an affliction of great pain, the second is a conflagration of many cities, the third is a destruction and pestilence of animals, the fourth is famine, the fifth is destruction of rulers by earthquake and war, the sixth is storm, hail, and snow, the seventh is slaughter by wild beasts, the eighth is alternating famine and pestilence, the ninth is destruction by sword and warfare, the tenth is a terrifying display of thunder, voices, and earthquake.

The elect will survive these agonies, since their number has been predetermined. God reveals to Abraham the sure reward of his faithful seed. "They shall live and be established through sacrifices and gifts of righteousness and truth in the age of the righteous, and shall rejoice in me continually." But destruction

awaits the wicked. God promises to send his Elect One, the Messiah, who will gather the despised people of Israel from among the nations, casting into the fire those who have insulted them, and who have ruled them during the ungodly age.

The fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 A.D. was a staggering blow to the Jews. This calamity, followed by further unhappy experiences during the next half-century, called forth two more noteworthy and very similar revelations known respectively as the Apocalypse of Baruch and IV Ezra. The book of Baruch purports to record the visions experienced by Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch, soon after the first destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. But it is perfectly evident that the real author, or authors, whose identity is unknown, lived in the Roman period and wrote to cheer afflicted Jews in the latter part of the first century A.D. The purpose of the book is similar to that of all apocalyptic writings. Even though sinners may seem to be temporarily triumphant, the righteous are admonished to persist in their piety, believing that God in his own good time will come to their assistance in order to bestow

upon them a glorious reward and to mete out terrible punishments to their enemies.

When the captives are carried off to Babylonia, Baruch is represented as remaining behind among the ruins of the city. On falling asleep he has a vision of a proud cedar tree, typifying the haughty Roman Empire. When God interprets the vision to Baruch the course of future history, up to the coming of the Messiah, is disclosed. The seer is informed that the Babylonian kingdom is to be succeeded by the dominion of the Persians, who in turn are to be subjugated by the Greeks. Lastly a fourth kingdom, that of the Romans, will arise, whose power will be harsh and evil far beyond that of its predecessors. Though exalting itself more than the cedars of Lebanon, the Roman Empire will ultimately be brought to a sudden and inglorious end by the advent of God's Messiah. This heavenly prince will slaughter the Roman host, saving alive the last emperor only. Of his fate God explicitly instructs Baruch:

> He shall be bound and they shall take him up to Mount Zion, and my Messiah shall convict him of all his impieties, and shall gather and set before him all the works of his hosts. And afterward he shall put him to death and protect the rest of my people which shall be found in the place which I have chosen.

After a period of fasting Baruch is favored with further revelations prophetic of the coming golden age of messianic rule. As this event draws near the terrors of the last times increase, but the righteous who survive will be fittingly rewarded, and those who have died will be restored to life. To Baruch's inquiry God himself replies:

> The earth shall then assuredly restore the dead, which it now receiveth in order to preserve them. It shall make no change in their form, but as it hath received so shall it restore them, and as I deliver them unto it so shall it raise them.

Judgment is to follow the resurrection. Sinners will be consigned to torment, while the righteous shall be given a splendor surpassing that of angels. In this faith the pious sufferers await expectantly the day of their vindication,

> for the youth of the world is past, and the strength of the creation is already exhausted, and the advent of the times is very short, yea, they have passed by. And the pitcher is near the cistern, and the ship to the port, and the course of the journey to the city, and life to its consummation.

Like the Apocalypse of Baruch, IV Ezra was called into existence by the calamities that overtook the Jews in the latter part of the first century A.D. In content the book describes

seven visions of Ezra in the time of the Exile, but the grief of the ancient seer over the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians is a patent literary device for expressing grief over the havoc recently wrought by the Romans in the Holy City. Ezra begs to know why Israel, whom God has chosen above all peoples as his own peculiar possession, should be permitted to suffer so severely at the hands of sinners. In answer to this prayer an angel assures Ezra that God's love for Israel has not in the least abated, but that his designs for the world are too comprehensive and far-reaching to be readily grasped by mortals. The divine plan embraces a glorious ultimate deliverance for his people. The present world, however, is evil, and its evils must continue to multiply until the appointed time for divine intervention arrives. Increase of agonies may well give cheer and courage, since the acceleration of distress brings near the impending catastrophic end. The signs of the last times are revealed to the seer, "Behold the days come when the inhabitants of the earth shall be seized with great panic, and the way of truth shall be hidden, and the lands be barren of faith." As the end approaches, all nature will be out of

joint. The sun will suddenly appear in the midnight sky, and the moon will shine by day. Blood will trickle from wood, and stones will speak. The fish in the sea will die, wide gaps will appear in the earth, volcanic eruptions will occur, wild beasts will come forth from their haunts, monsters will be born of human parents, ignorance will prevail, and sin will gain the upper hand.

Ezra's second and third visions are concerned with the same general problem. He receives new assurances that this present evil age is fast hastening to its end. But a new age, to be created by God himself, is held in store for the faithful. When wickedness has reached the climax to which it is rapidly approaching, the new Jerusalem will be revealed. Here righteous Israel will dwell with the Messiah in perfect bliss for four hundred years. At the end of this period all will die, the Messiah included, and creation will return to the silence of primeval chaos. Then will follow the new creation, when the dead will be raised, the righteous receiving their reward in Paradise while the wicked are delivered to punishment in Gehenna.

The fourth vision reveals the glories of the heavenly Jerusalem prepared for the righteous.

This promise of the restoration of Zion's glory is given to Ezra particularly to assuage his sorrow:

> The Most High seeing that thou art grieved deeply and art distressed whole-heartedly on account of her, hath showed thee the brilliance of her glory and her majestic beauty.

The fifth vision portrays the downfall of Rome. The seer beholds a monstrous eagle with many wings and three heads, typifying the imperial Roman power. While Ezra gazes upon this creature, a lion symbolizing the Messiah appears upon the scene and pronounces the early destruction of the eagle:

> Thou hast wielded power over the world with great terror, and over all the inhabited earth with grievous oppression. . . . . Then the Most High regarded his times, and lo they were ended, and his ages and they were fulfilled. Therefore shalt thou disappear, O thou eagle, and thy horrible wings and thy little wings most evil, thy harm-dealing heads, thy hurtful talons, and all thy worthless body.

Thus the Jewish seer is firmly convinced that he stands at the end of the age when the downfall of haughty Rome is imminent. In this conviction he occupied common ground with his Christian contemporary John, who for very different reasons predicted an equally sweeping destruction of the Roman Empire through the catastrophic intervention of God and his Messiah.

A brief description of the Messiah's appearing is the subject of Ezra's sixth vision. A figure in the form of a man, arising out of the sea, is seen flying with the clouds of heaven and striking terror into everything upon which he fixes his gaze. The hostile heathen hosts which oppose him are quickly devoured by a fiery stream of flaming breath proceeding from his mouth. Following this marvelous triumph his peaceable subjects assemble to participate in the new messianic kingdom.

The seer is favored with a seventh and final vision, in which he receives assurance that his own translation to the heavenly regions is at hand. There he will dwell with the Messiah and his companions until the end of the age, which is hastening to a close. The world had already passed through nine and a half of the total twelve periods marking its completed course. Grown weak through age, its power to resist the forces of evil will rapidly decline. Consequently those who continue upon earth will suffer even greater distresses than have already been experienced in Rome's destruction of the Jewish state. But the pious Jews should not lose heart, since God's plan involves the early destruction of Roman

rule and the establishment of a messianic régime.

Such in outline is the history of apocalyptic writing among Jews. Particularly from the time of Antiochus Epiphanes to the destruction of the Jewish state by Rome pious seers frequently resorted to apocalyptic visions as a source of inspiration for the faithful in periods of sore distress. The persistence of these Jewish revelations amply attests the popularity and value of this type of literature for people of that age. When the Christian apocalyptist John held out to his suffering companions the hope of an early end of the world and the speedy advent of a heavenly messianic kingdom as a sure way of escape from Roman oppression, he was following a well-beaten path leading past many familiar landmarks. In confidently resorting to apocalyptic imagery for a solution of his difficulties he was moving in an atmosphere thoroughly congenial to many Christians, acquainted as they were with these Jewish antecedents of their own religion.

V. GENTILE APOCALYPSES

While it is unquestionably true that Christianity inherited its taste for apocalyptic mainly

from Judaism, a similar interest, though expressed in quite different form, was to some extent present among Gentiles even before their conversion to Christianity. Greeks and Romans frequently viewed the present order of existence pessimistically, and predicted an increase of evils until the time for the catastrophic dissolution of the world approached. Nor were Gentiles without hope of the advent of a new ideal age. In constructing their picture of the future the note of immediacy was far less pronounced than in most Jewish apocalypses, and the imagery employed by Gentiles to depict the transformation lacks the dramatic features that characterize the Jewish descriptions of their Messiah's advent. But dissatisfaction with the present world, a belief in its further deterioration, a conviction that it was doomed to ultimate catastrophe, and the expectation of a great renewal of creation were convictions already fixed in the minds of many Gentiles before they came into contact with either Judaism or Christianity.[1]

These phases of gentile thinking constituted a helpful preparation for the free use of Jewish

[1] For details regarding these gentile hopes see S. J. Case, *The Millennial Hope*, chap. i.

apocalyptic imagery by early Christians in gentile territory. But among the heathen these cosmic speculations belonged in their mythologies and philosophies, and did not form the subject-matter of their apocalyptic. It was usually concerned more exclusively with the future of the individual in the regions of torment or of bliss beyond the grave. While these individual interests also find recognition in various Jewish and early Christian revelations, they are here generally subordinated to the larger cosmic program which is the seer's chief concern. On the other hand, the gentile seer is usually content with simply bringing to his contemporaries a message from the other world to warn them of the dangers that there await sinners and to cheer them with a promise of rewards for the worthy. A few examples of gentile apocalypses will serve to acquaint the modern reader with this form of imagery so familiar to the Greek-speaking world of early Christian times.

Every Greek boy in ancient times knew the content of the Homeric poems as well as the modern youth knows his nursery rhymes or the stories narrated in his primer. The eleventh book of the *Odyssey* describes a visit of Odysseus

to Hades in search of information regarding the possibility of a successful return to his native land after his long absence in the Trojan War. His quest is rewarded by the seer Teiresias, who informs him that the homeward journey will be fraught with many perils to be escaped only by carefully heeding the wishes of the deathless gods. By following the instructions of the seer Odysseus is ultimately to accomplish a safe return, after which he will live to a ripe old age and die in peace among his friends. The seer supports his revelation with the solemn assertion, "This that I say is truth."

Other items of interest are also revealed to Odysseus during his visit to the nether regions. He is privileged to converse with his mother, whose death has occurred during his absence. She tells him news of his wife and other members of the family still alive and anxiously awaiting his return. He also learns that even the blessed dead have but a shadowy and joyless existence, grievous to the sight of the living, from whom they are separated by great rivers and dreadful streams. On endeavoring to embrace his mother he learns that now she is only an intangible spirit. She informs him

that the body does not survive the funeral pyre, "for the sinews no more bind together the flesh and the bones, but the great force of burning fire abolishes these so soon as the life hath left the white bones, and the spirit like a dream flies forth and hovers near." Among other sights disclosed to Odysseus is the judgment hall of Minos, who sits on his throne passing sentence on the dead as they come into his presence. The life of the worthy dead in Hades is a shadowy replica of their earthly careers, as when Orion is seen pursuing the very same wild beasts that he had slain on earth. Real torture seems to be reserved for only noted characters. Odysseus beholds Tityos stretched upon the ground with vultures constantly gnawing at his liver. Tantalus is shown in grievous torment, vainly striving to quench his thirst with the ever-receding water, or with the fruits which constantly elude his grasp. Sisyphus is also seen perpetually engaged in the fruitless effort to roll a monstrous stone to the brow of a hill.

When these secrets of the other world had been revealed to Odysseus he returned again to earth with new courage to resume his wandering. But the apocalyptic wisdom thus

acquired not only assured him of a successful homeward journey. It also served the poet as a means of satisfying popular curiosity regarding conditions in the world beyond the grave.

An ancient and popular medium of divine revelation among the Greeks and Romans was the Sibyl, who "sang to mortal men prophecies of events yet to come." Tradition reported that a Sibyl at Delphi had foretold events leading up to the Trojan War, and had predicted its successful outcome for the Greeks. She uttered her revelations in verse while in a state of frenzy induced by inspiration of the deity by whom she was thought to be possessed. Ecstasy was a characteristic equipment of different Sibylline prophetesses. Only when the deity had thus filled them with his own mind were they able to behold the course of coming events which it was their mission to reveal to suppliants. With free play of the poetic imagination, yet true to popular notions, Virgil describes the Cumaean Sibyl in action:

> Suddenly her countenance and her hue changed, and her tresses fell disordered. Her bosom panted, her wild heart swelled with fury, and she grew taller to the view, and her voice rang out not of mortality, now that the god breathed on her in nearer presence.

Before the beginning of the Christian Era ten Sibyls of repute were known, and their reported utterances had come to constitute a recognized body of literature, part of which the Roman state had officially set aside as a unique source of divine wisdom to be formally consulted at especially critical moments in history. Although only stray fragments of these ancient Sibylline verses have survived, this form of literature was once so popular that both Jews and Christians adopted it as a vehicle for conveying their respective messages to the heathen. The Sibylline oracles still extant are a conglomerate of heathen, Jewish, and Christian apocalyptic utterances, but their survival in Jewish and Christian circles is an enduring testimony to the popularity originally enjoyed by this type of thinking among Gentiles in ancient times.

More in line with the Homeric account of Odysseus, one of the speakers in Plato's *Republic*[1] recites a popular legend regarding the experiences of a certain Er. His soul left the body for twelve days, during which time he was permitted to observe the activities of disembodied spirits. He visited the halls of judgment where the righteous were being directed

[1] x. 614 ff.

on their way heavenward, while the unjust were commanded to descend to the lower regions. In the same locality he also saw souls returning, some from hell and some from heaven, to receive a new incarnation. Here he heard conversations regarding heaven or hell and learned that hell was a place of grievous torment, but heaven a place of inconceivable beauty. Judgments were so apportioned as to make the sinner suffer tenfold for his wrongdoing, while "the rewards of beneficence and justice and holiness were in the same proportion." When adequate punishment had been administered souls were permitted to return to earth for another incarnation. Only to cruel tyrants or great criminals was this privilege of reincarnation denied. These persons were consigned to eternal torment in hell, where wild men of fiery aspect bound them hand and foot, flayed them with scourges, and carded them on thorns like wool. He also learned of the responsibility which rested upon a soul to decide the manner of its next incarnation and the terrible mistakes it might make unless it had acquired philosophic instruction during its previous sojourn upon earth.

Such was the revelation made to Er. In order that he might be the messenger of the other world to men, "they bade him hear and see all that was to be heard and seen in that place." The speaker in the dialogue rehearses the story for its practical value. It

> may be our salvation, if we are obedient to the word spoken. . . . . Wherefore my counsel is that we hold fast to the heavenly way and follow after justice and virtue always, considering that the soul is immortal and able to endure every sort of good and every sort of evil.

Another example of a gentile apocalypse is Cicero's account of the dream of Scipio. On the night after Publius Cornelius Scipio arrived in Africa he beheld in a vision his grandfather Africanus, who opened up the future and revealed to Scipio secrets of heaven. The younger man was informed that he would one day overthrow Carthage and serve the Romans in other remarkable ways. As an inducement to fidelity in the service of his country he was assured that heaven holds in store an endless duration of happiness for all who have preserved or assisted or improved their country. On inquiring whether his father Paulus still lives, the latter immediately appears to admonish the

son to cultivate piety and justice particularly toward his country, for "such a life is the path to heaven and the assembly of those who have lived before and who having been released from their bodies, inhabit that place which thou beholdest." The arrangement of the heavenly regions is shown to Scipio, where the souls of noble men exist previous to their descent to earth, and whither they return when their earthly course has been run.

The apocalyptic motif finds expression again in Virgil, who describes the wonderful things revealed to Aeneas on the occasion of his visit to the lower regions.[1] First he views the place of torment, which is described much more vividly and with more detail than in Homer. Sinners of various types are receiving due punishments, the lesson being that men should learn to do justice and contemn not the gods. So frightful are the sufferings that the narrator exclaims, "Not though a thousand tongues were mine, a hundred mouths, and a voice of iron, could I number all those forms of crime or rehearse the tale of vengeance."

The abodes of the blessed offer Aeneas a very different picture. The region is one of pure

[1] *Aeneid* vi. 572 ff.

delight, where heroes of the past are seen enjoying their well-earned rewards:

> Here was the company of them who battled and bled for their fatherland; here they who were priests and holy while life knew them still; they who were loyal bards and sang meetly for Phoebus' ear, or ennobled life by arts discovered; with all whose service to their kind won them remembrance among men.

But a still greater encouragement to Aeneas are the disclosures made to him by his father Anchises, whom he meets in these regions. Ascending an eminence from which their gaze can range widely over the plain, Aeneas is shown the future glories of the Roman nation which he is to found as a result of his long and perilous wanderings. He is assured that one day glorious Rome shall "bound her empire by the earth, her pride by Olympus."

This survey of gentile apocalyptic may be concluded with an illustration from Plutarch,[1] who was a contemporary of the author of Revelation. The story is told of a certain Thespesius of Soli, a very wicked youth, whose course of life was completely changed by a vision of the tortures of hell revealed to him during a three days' visit made by his soul in

[1] *Concerning Whom God Is Slow to Punish* 22 ff.

the world of the dead. So thoroughly was his life transformed by this experience that thereafter no one excelled him either in justice, or in piety toward the gods, or in hostility to wickedness, or in devotion to friends.

Thespesius, temporarily freed from his body, found himself among a throng of departed spirits on their way through the air to the halls of justice. Here he learned that there were three gradations of punishment. The first and mildest was in the form of bodily afflictions suffered during one's lifetime. The second was more severe, but also occurred upon earth, and was effected through the civil administration of justice. The third and most drastic was enacted after death upon those sinners who had not been cured by the punishments of earth. In the life beyond, these recalcitrant spirits were hounded about from place to place, unable to find shelter or relief, being afflicted with a thousand miseries, and finally plunged headlong into "an invisible abyss, the hideousness of which no tongue can express."

Thespesius endeavored to describe the torments which he was permitted to see. Among the throng he beheld his own father, full of stripes, gashes, and scars, tormented for once

having poisoned several of his guests in order to possess himself of their wealth. He had died without divulging his secret, but after death the marks of the evil deed were easily discovered upon his naked soul, and retribution was therefore inevitable. Punishments of the wicked assumed a great variety of forms, corresponding with the magnitude of the sins committed. One favorite type of torture was inflicted by demons who first plunged souls into a lake of boiling gold, from which they were suddenly thrown into a frigid lake of lead, and after this they were dragged over a rough mass of iron. These and similar torments were repeated time and again, while the sufferers howled in agony over the memory of what they had already endured, and cringed before new tortures to which they were ever being dragged by their tormentors.

Finally Thespesius saw the souls of those who were to be given a second life upon earth after receiving their due meed of punishment. A reference to Nero in this connection is of particular interest to the student of Revelation:

> Among the rest he saw the soul of Nero many ways most grievously tortured, but more especially transfixed with iron nails. This soul the workmen

took in hand, but when they had forged it into the form of one of Pindar's vipers, which eats its way to life through the bowels of the female, of a sudden a conspicuous light shone out and a voice was heard out of the light which gave order for the transfiguring it again into the shape of some more mild and gentle creature. And so they made it to resemble one of those creatures that usually sing and croak about the sides of ponds and marshes. For indeed he had in some measure been punished for the crimes he had committed. Besides there was some compassion due to him from the gods, for that he had restored the Grecians to their liberty, a nation the most noble and best beloved of the gods among all his subjects.

VI. CHRISTIAN APOCALYPSES

The Revelation of John was not the only apocalypse produced by early Christians. Almost half a century earlier, in the second chapter of the second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul had briefly recounted the course of events to attend the coming of the end of the world. He predicted an increase of evil to culminate in the apparent triumph of the man of sin, who would take possession of the temple and set himself up as God. In Paul's day this demonic power was being temporarily restrained, but presently, when the restraint should be removed, Paul expected the lawless

one to be revealed in all his wickedness. Then the heavenly Christ would descend in power to destroy all the works of Satan.

The thirteenth chapter of Mark, reproduced in Matthew and Luke, also contains a small apocalypse. In characteristic Jewish fashion it predicts a succession of terrors to precede the end of the world. False Messiahs will appear, endeavoring to lead astray the faithful, while wars, earthquakes, and famines will prevail. As the new religion spreads through gentile lands Christians will suffer persecution, being hated by all men, but their deliverance through the return of Christ is not far off. Great tribulation is to come upon the people of Judea, tribulation such as has not been witnessed upon earth since the world was created. This period of distress, which God will make brief for the elect's sake, is to be followed by a collapse of nature's powers, exhibited in the darkening of sun and moon, in the falling of the stars, and in the shaking of the heavens. Then the Son of Man will appear in his glory to gather together the elect in the new kingdom. The people of Mark's day were consoled by the assurance that the period of waiting for Christ's return would be comparatively brief. The exact hour

of his coming was known to none save the Father, yet the momentous event would occur during the lifetime of some of Jesus' own contemporaries.[1]

The foregoing illustrations of Christian apocalyptic current before the Book of Revelation was written are typical of an interest which dominates the outlook of Paul and which is prominent in many passages of the first three Gospels. While the development of apocalyptic imagery in Revelation is much more elaborate than in any extant Christian writing of an earlier date, the theme itself is certainly not new to John. Nor did interest in the subject cease with the publication of his book. This interest continued to manifest itself both in the preservation by Christians of current Jewish works and in the composition of new Christian apocalypses.

Several examples of Jewish writings recast or supplemented to produce Christian apocalypses might be cited. The book commonly known as the Ascension of Isaiah is in its present form a combination of a Jewish account of Isaiah's martyrdom with two apocalyptic Christian supplements, one known as the Testament

[1] Mark 9:1; 13:32.

of Hezekiah and the other as the Vision of Isaiah. Probably these combined works in their present form first appeared at some time in the second century A.D., but the Christian parts may have arisen at an earlier date and have been almost contemporaneous with the Book of Revelation.

The Testament of Hezekiah records that Isaiah had foreseen and revealed to King Hezekiah the course of Christian history from the time of Jesus' activity to the end of the age. The prophet is said to have disclosed such outstanding items of alleged future history as the descent of Jesus from heaven, his career upon earth, including his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, his commission given to the disciples, the early successes of the new religion, the rise of evils in the church, and the last great persecution of Christians by the Roman imperial power under the leadership of a reincarnated Satanic Nero, who plays the part of the traditional antichrist. The climactic period of distress to endure three years, seven months, and twenty-seven days is to be followed by the appearing of Jesus accompanied by the armies of heaven to overthrow Satan and drag him down into Gehenna. The faithful will be rewarded,

the dead saints descending with Christ, and the living righteous being preserved to share the blessings of the new order in which the Lord himself ministers to those who have kept faithful watch for his coming. On the other hand, the godless who have served Satan will be consumed by the fire of divine judgment.

In the Vision of Isaiah the content of the seer's message is much the same as in the Testament of Hezekiah, but the experiences of the seer are described with greater detail. The scene is laid in the court of King Hezekiah. With the king were his advisers, all the princes of Israel, and prophets and sons of the prophets who had come from the surrounding country to hear Isaiah's message. When they had assembled, Isaiah being in their midst, they suddenly heard a door opening and the Holy Spirit uttering a voice. Thereupon the seer passed into a trance of which a very realistic description is given:

> He became silent, and his mind was taken up from him, and he saw not the men that stood before him, though his eyes indeed were open. Moreover his lips were silent and the mind in his body was taken up from him. But his breath was in him, for he was seeing a vision. And the angel who was sent to make him see, was not of this firmament, nor was he of the

angels of the glory of this world, but he had come from the seventh heaven. . . . . And the vision which the holy Isaiah saw was not from this world, but from the world which is hidden from the flesh.

In narrating the content of his vision Isaiah describes his journey upward through each heaven to the seventh and last, where God himself dwells together with Christ, innumerable angels, the angel of the Holy Spirit, and all deceased righteous, among whom Abel and Enoch in particular are mentioned. Here the seer learns that Christ will one day descend into the world, passing unrecognized on his journey downward to earth. The events of his earthly career, his triumph over death, his commission given to the Twelve, and his victorious return to the seventh heaven are clearly witnessed by Isaiah in his vision. On returning to his body he narrates his experiences to Hezekiah, assuring him that "both the end of this world and all this vision will be consummated in the last generations."

In its present form the previously described Apocalypse of Ezra also contains Christian supplements, both at the beginning and at the close of the book. Large portions of the Sibylline books were composed by Christians, who

followed the example of their Jewish predecessors in imitating this type of gentile apocalypse. Perhaps the lost Oracles of Hystaspes occasionally referred to in early Christian literature were also originally Jewish works subsequently revised in accordance with a more distinctly Christian point of view. Evidently Christians felt no hesitation in thus enlarging or recasting Jewish apocalyptic writings to meet their own peculiar needs, but at the same time they also appropriated without essential alteration many Jewish revelations, which continued to be widely read in Christian circles.

Of the many new Christian apocalypses written after the time of John, it will suffice for purposes of illustration to cite only two, the so-called Apocalypse of Peter and the Shepherd of Hermas. The authors of these books are among the earliest of John's successors, and while their writings illustrate the persistence of Christian interest in apocalyptic, they also show a marked tendency to develop the theme along new lines suitable to the new needs of the gentile Christian communities.

Before the end of the second century A.D. these two writings had come to be so highly esteemed that they almost obtained recognition

among the group of Christian books which ultimately attained the rank of a new Holy Scripture, worthy of a place beside the Old Testament in the public worship of the churches. The so-called Muratorian canon contains the following:

> Moreover of apocalypses we receive that of John and of Peter only, although certain of us will not have the latter read in the church. Indeed, Hermas quite recently in our own times composed the Shepherd in the city of Rome, while his brother Pius occupied the seat of bishop of the Roman church (about 140–55 A.D.), and therefore it ought to be read in private. But to the people in the church even to the end of the age it can never be read either among the prophets, for their number is complete, or among the apostles.

Thus it would appear that both books were in existence at least as early as the year 150 A.D.

Although the Apocalypse of Peter has survived only in fragmentary form, it evidently was composed along the lines of gentile rather than of Jewish apocalyptic. Its chief concern is not with the future of the world but with that of the individual, and it describes both the blessings of the righteous and the torments of the wicked in characteristic gentile fashion. It represents Jesus and the disciples on their way to a certain mountain, where the disciples ask

to be shown one of their departed brethren in order that those still upon earth may be encouraged by an assurance of future blessedness. In response to this request two marvelously handsome creatures appear, exhibiting the splendor of the form possessed by the righteous Christian dead. A second vision, apparently granted to Peter only, discloses more at length the future state first of the righteous and then of the wicked. The abode of the blessed is

> a very great country outside of this world, exceeding bright with light and the air there lighted with the rays of the sun and the earth itself blooming with unfading flowers and full of spices and plants, fair flowering and incorruptible and bearing blessed fruit. And so great was the perfume that it was borne thence even unto us. And the dwellers in that place were clad in the raiment of shining angels, and their raiment was like unto their country, and angels hovered about them there. And the glory of the dwellers there was equal, and with one voice they sang praises alternately to the Lord God, rejoicing in that place.

The tortures of the wicked stand in sharp contrast to the joys of the righteous. Various forms of punishment are described, each being so devised as to fit specific offenses of different sinners. Those who have blasphemed the way of righteousness are seen hanging by their tongues, while the fires of torment burn be-

neath them. Some sinners are cast into a lake of flaming mire, while others receive their punishment suspended above the flames by the hair or by the feet. Murderers and their accomplices were consigned to a narrow place full of snakes by which they were continually smitten, while the souls of those who had been murdered gazed upon the scene with satisfaction. Persecutors of the Christians were punished with especial severity, their tortures varying with the part each had taken in the persecutions. Those who previously had trusted in earthly riches now wore tattered and filthy raiment and were forced to roll on sharp, red-hot pebbles. Special forms of torture were imposed upon usurers, image-makers, idolaters, and apostates.

At this point the fragment breaks off, but its content is sufficiently extensive to show that Christians in the generation succeeding John continued to use apocalyptic as a means of instruction and encouragement. To be sure, the author of the Petrine apocalypse was interested in a very different set of problems from those which John sought to solve, but both alike resorted to a divine revelation as a means of conveying to their respective readers the particular message which the occasion seemed

to demand. The issue of supreme importance for John was the rising conflict between the imperial cult and Christianity as a new religious movement, while the author of the Apocalypse of Peter was concerned more particularly with offering individuals a picture of future rewards and punishments that would stimulate correct personal religious living.

Hermas also writes primarily in the interest of personal piety among Christians. But instead of portraying at length the rewards of the righteous and the punishments of the wicked as an inducement to holy living, his visions have a more extensive didactic content. The different mediators of his revelations deliver comparatively lengthy addresses of instruction which he is admonished to pass on to his fellow-Christians. Typical of the content of the book is the message of the woman who appears to the seer in the opening vision:

> They that entertain evil purposes in their hearts bring upon themselves death and captivity, especially they that claim for themselves this present world and boast in its riches and cleave not to the good things that are to come. Their souls shall rue it, seeing that they have no hope, but have abandoned themselves and their life. But do thou pray unto God and he shall heal thine own sins and those of thy whole house and of all the saints.

The first three revelations to Hermas are made by a woman symbolizing the church, who admonishes him especially to correct his own sin and those of his wife and children. The third vision also presents a long description of the process by which the church is being reared like a stone tower, the different stones and their allotment symbolizing the status of different persons in relation to Christianity. In his fourth vision Hermas finds himself confronted by a terrible sea monster, whose significance is not understood until the heavenly woman appears once more with an interpretation, explaining that the black color upon the beast's head stands for the present world, the fiery color for impending catastrophe, the golden color for the Christians' period of testing, and the white color for the new age to come. Since Hermas sees the church almost completed he anticipates an early end for the present world.

The second main division of this apocalypse is a body of religious instructions mediated by a heavenly apparition in the garb of a shepherd, who communicates divine wisdom to Hermas. Of his own part in the composition of the book the author says:

> I wrote down the commandments and parables as he commanded me. If then when ye hear them ye keep them and walk in them and do them with a pure heart, ye shall receive from the Lord all things that he promised you. But if when ye hear them ye do not repent but still add to your sins ye shall receive from the Lord the opposite. All these the shepherd the angel of repentance commanded me to write.[1]

Then follow, as in the earlier portions of the work, extended admonitions toward the cultivation of the various Christian virtues, with particular emphasis upon the possibility and the desirability of repentance on the part of backsliders.

The foregoing survey of apocalyptic writings current among Jews, Gentiles, and Christians provides the appropriate and necessary setting for further study of the Revelation of John. Readers of that day would be amply prepared to appreciate a new document of this familiar type. It would undoubtedly appeal to the Christians of Asia as not only thoroughly intelligible but also both interesting and profitable. John's book has often been gravely misunderstood by subsequent generations of readers, because of their failure to catch the spirit of those ancient times when apocalyptic writings were a familiar means of religious instruction.

[1] *Vis.* 5:6 f.

CHAPTER III

THE MAKING OF A REVELATION

How were books of revelation produced? The peculiar characteristics of apocalypses as a distinct type of religious literature will become more clear on further examination of certain outstanding genetic factors that entered into their making. As a rule these writings were called into existence by similar practical demands for a special interpretation of religion that would function in periods of peculiar distress. They dealt in whole or in part with a common stock of ideas, and the same typical literary methods were employed in their composition.

I. FUNCTION OF APOCALYPTIC

Generally speaking, an apocalypse is the peculiar product of a time of adversity. When mortals find themselves overwhelmed by misfortunes or plunged in perplexities, escape from despair is sought in a special disclosure of God's kindly designs for the future. The seer sets before the eyes of his afflicted readers

a picture of coming victory as the reward of present endurance. It is assumed that man, through his own efforts, is quite incapable either of averting present misfortune or of insuring for himself a happy future. In fact while awaiting the hour of his deliverance he may anticipate only an aggravation of his distresses. Yet in the moment of direst agony the light of apocalyptic hope burns brightest. Under more ordinary circumstances, when the course of daily living and thinking moves smoothly forward upon its accustomed way, interest in apocalyptic tends to abate. But periods of great political, social, or religious upheaval demand the services of the apocalyptic seer who can reinforce the faltering faith of the afflicted by disclosing the hidden purposes of the Deity, and by picturing a coming time when the righteous will enjoy unfailing rewards while sinners suffer relentless punishments.

It was especially true of Jewish apocalypses that they were designed to counteract or interpret critical experiences through which readers were passing at the time these books were composed. As has already been observed, the Book of Daniel was published to encourage patient endurance on the part of pious Jews

during the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes. The group of writings connected with the name of Enoch was called forth by the unhappy experiences of the righteous during the turbulent period of Maccabean times. And for the most part all subsequent Jewish apocalypses were inspired by Roman oppression.

In their own way gentile apocalypses served a similarly practical end. Among Gentiles the stress of outward circumstances was usually far less acute than in the case of the Jews. But nevertheless the function of the gentile seer was that of mediating superhuman wisdom to inquirers in moments of extremity. In times of distress or doubt the ancient pagan drew upon revelation for assurances of future safety, whether the particular need was individual or national. The various Sibyls were famous for their supposed ability to reveal the fates. Even after the different Sibylline shrines fell into decay the Roman Senate continued to seek guidance from the Sibylline oracles in times of national danger. The revelations made to Scipio in his dream or to Aeneas in his vision of Hades are evidently designed primarily to encourage the immediate cultivation of national well-being. On the other hand

the practical function of other apocalypses, such as the revelations to Er or those to Thespesius, is more distinctly to stimulate by warnings of punishment or promises of reward a worthy type of life for individuals while still upon earth.

Among the earliest Christians, as among their Jewish predecessors and contemporaries, apocalyptic hopes throve on adversity of circumstances. Prominent in the message of the first Christian preachers was the expectation of Jesus' return in messianic glory at an early date to establish his dominion upon a thoroughly renovated earth. This confidence in an imminent divine intervention to right the ills of life enabled Christians to endure without faltering both the opposition of their Jewish kinsmen and the hostility of their gentile enemies. While Christians remained relatively few in numbers and the prospect for a universal triumph of the new religion by ordinary means of missionary propaganda seemed doubtful, faith in the ultimate victory of God drew its inspiration largely from apocalyptic imagery. Thus Paul amid the adversities of his labors found satisfaction and courage in believing that the day of the Lord was at hand. Similarly the

Christian writers who composed the Synoptic Gospels noted with satisfaction the current report that Jesus himself had foretold his early return in apocalyptic triumph to bring their feeble missionary efforts to a victorious conclusion. And when the Roman imperial power seemed to John to menace the very existence of the new religion, apocalyptic expectations again came to the rescue, serving the Christians as a means of expressing their unconquerable faith in the ultimate triumph of their cause.

As Christianity expanded both numerically and territorially, the demand for apocalyptic writings gradually diminished. The odds against the new religion no longer seemed so stupendous as to demand the early catastrophic intervention of God to secure its triumph and rescue it from destruction. More gradual and normal processes of growth now seemed to offer sufficient promises of success to satisfy immediate needs. Nevertheless certain individuals or groups within Christianity continued to cherish apocalyptic fancies as a source of help in times of perplexity and as a means of heightening confidence in the ultimate victory of Christian strivings. Impelled by a desire to stimulate

loyal attachment to the new religion, the author of the Apocalypse of Peter held before the eyes of his readers a vivid apocalyptic picture of future rewards and punishments. Hermas sought a similarly supernatural authority for emphasizing the necessity of holy living. But after the middle of the second century Christians rapidly lost interest in apocalyptic.

As a rule apocalypses were written to function in crises; they were essentially tracts for the times. The recognition of this fact is fundamental for their correct interpretation. Primarily they were not products of purely literary interest. They were not called forth simply by a desire for literary expression, such as might prompt the writing of a modern religious fiction. To be sure they are not devoid of literary art,[1] and they often give free play to the religious imagination, but in most cases the incentive for their production is the stress of the times rather than any merely spontaneous literary impulse. They are written to offset specific distresses of the moment, and their meaning for the author and his contemporaries will become clear only as an apocalypse is read strictly in the light of the

[1] See below, pp. 148 ff.

original function which it was designed to serve. This is the first law to be observed in the study of all apocalyptic writings.

II. CHARACTERISTIC APOCALYPTIC IDEAS

Although most ancient apocalypses were called into being by specific historical crises, nevertheless the thinking of their authors moves within a relatively narrow circle of ideas which they share largely in common. Since they were not vigorous literary creators, they usually made little if any effort at originality either in thinking or in expression. At various times according to their several needs they chose one or another item from the common stock of apocalyptic ideas, reinterpreting them to meet the peculiar exigencies of the occasion. While individual apocalyptists sometimes exhibited remarkably vivid powers of imagination, there is among all of them a striking similarity in their fundamental notions.

A belief in the peculiar inspiration of the seer as a necessary medium of revelation is a characteristic of all apocalyptic. He is thought to be an especially selected individual to whom divine secrets have been divulged and whose word is therefore unquestionably authoritative.

It is also uniformly assumed that his information has been derived from deity in some unusual but peculiarly significant manner. Whether he is the Hebrew Daniel, the Greek Odysseus, or the Christian John, the experience of this favored individual is uniformly relegated to the divine sphere.

Roughly speaking, the content of the seer's vision is either individualistic or cosmic in its emphasis. That is, some apocalyptists are chiefly concerned with disclosing future rewards and punishments for individuals, while others are more interested in the ultimate outcome of world-history. The older types of Jewish apocalypse are strikingly lacking in individualistic items, while the gentile apocalypses on the other hand are almost completely devoid of all cosmic speculations. But late Jewish and early Christian revelations contain both features, although interest in portraying the individual's future destiny is usually quite secondary to the seer's larger program for the consummation of world-history.

Acquaintance with the philosophy of history which characterizes Jewish apocalyptic writings is of especial value to the student of the Book of Revelation. This scheme of thinking as-

sumes the existence of two worlds in deadly conflict with one another. Each of these worlds is believed to be under the control of a powerful superhuman ruler. Satan is supreme in the realm of evil, while God reigns in the kingdom of righteousness. Satan's chief seat is in the lower regions, but he has extended his activities to cover the earth and the air above the earth. The demons are his numerous assistants, who are ever on the alert to bring men under their control. God, on the other hand, dwells above the bell-shaped vault of the heavens, where he is surrounded by hosts of angels. These heavenly beings are his ministers, performing his will in the heavens and on occasion serving as his messengers of good-will to men. When the heavens are pictured as compartments laid one upon another several stories high, God's throne is placed in the highest heaven.

An apocalyptic writer commonly regards the ills of life as directly due to Satan and his demonic attendants, to whom God permits a temporary supremacy upon earth. Earthly kings and princes and particularly those rulers who persecute the righteous are unique embodiments of Satanic power. Idol-worship and all the culture of heathendom, which threaten to

overwhelm the people of God, are works of Satan. With the passing of the years the powers of darkness grow bolder and more efficient, thereby multiplying wickedness and making more unfortunate the lot of mankind. While Satan and his hosts are permitted to exercise their devices among mortals, there is no prospect of diminution in the misfortunes to which flesh is heir. In fact these distresses may be expected to increase in number and intensity as time progresses, since with practice Satan grows more and more accomplished in the execution of his fiendish designs.

Man single-handed carries on an unequal struggle against the powers of the lower world. His hope of victory does not lie in any ability of his own to thwart the activities of the evil one. The righteous man may so order his own life that Satan will have no control over his personal conduct, but the world about him is still dominated by demonic powers which man by all his efforts is incapable of banishing from the earth. Satan's defeat can be accomplished only by the special intervention of God. It is the task of the apocalyptic seer to discover assurances of God's intention of interfering at an early date to destroy the present demon-

ridden world and effect a complete deliverance of the righteous from all their ills.

As pictured in the apocalyptist's program, God's method of accomplishing the redemption of his people is to be catastrophic. Suddenly he will descend in person from his dwelling-place in the heavens or will send an angelic representative to execute judgment upon sinners. The earth is to be purged of all wickedness, including all princes and potentates. Satan's power upon earth is to be completely abolished. Some apocalyptists insert at this point a temporary residence of the heavenly Messiah with the saints upon the purified earth, after which the forces of evil break loose once more. But the last Satanic effort at self-assertion is to prove a complete failure. The heavenly powers will quickly and effectively accomplish an ultimate and glorious victory.

The final scene in this course of events is to be the allotment of rewards and punishments. The chosen people of God are to be gathered from all quarters of the earth into the new Jerusalem where Jehovah is to make his abode with them. There is to be a general resurrection of the dead, or at least of the righteous, who are to be rewarded by admission to citizenship

in the new Jerusalem. Earth and heaven undergo a process of complete renewal, all evil being forever abolished from the world. Sinners on the other hand are consigned to a place of punishment from which they, together with Satan and the demons, shall never find release.

The distinctiveness of apocalyptic may be further illustrated by comparison with ancient Hebrew prophecy. It is true that apocalyptic features are present in certain of the prophets, yet prophecy and apocalyptic show some fundamental contrasts. When the older prophets spoke of a coming catastrophe to be brought upon the world by Jehovah, they regarded the event as a punishment rather than a redemption for Israel. Sin and evil in the world were of man's making; therefore he must mend his ways in order to avert divine wrath. The prophet delivered a call to repentance and reform on the assumption that the world was capable of renovation through the moral regeneration of men if they would but heed the admonitions of the preacher and order their lives according to his teaching.

For the apocalyptist, on the contrary, the present world is incapable of reformation, since Satan is temporarily in control of its affairs.

Evil is not of man's making, nor is its complete removal within his power. World-renovation is purely God's affair, and man's duty is to await patiently the hour for divine intervention. Yet one must not assume that the apocalyptist has no interest in the moral attainments of his readers. Indeed he is often if not usually quite as sensitive to moral excellence as is the prophet. But he interprets the object of ethical striving in a different way. With him it is primarily a personal preparation for participation in the privileges of a new age, or is a means of inducing God to act on behalf of the righteous, but is not an integral factor in social reform. The apocalyptic preacher might call men to repentance with all the zeal of an Isaiah, but the object of repentance was preparation for the imminent catastrophic coming of God, and not reformation of the existing social order as a means of averting the day of wrath.

The prophet and the apocalyptist each spoke under divine guidance, but in this respect also they exhibit certain noteworthy contrasts. While the prophet may be capable of ecstasy and visions, these are not his peculiar equipment. His distinctive authority emanates

from an inner conviction that the word of God has entered into his soul. He bears, as it were, the authority of his message within himself, and so regards his normal utterance as the expression of the divine will. The apocalyptist on the other hand is distinctly a seer who communicates to his contemporaries not so much the word of God as the vision of God. Heavenly wisdom comes to him, not as a rational religious conviction, but in a moment of ecstatic frenzy when wonderful pictures or strange sounds impress themselves upon his abnormally agitated senses. His message is authenticated from without, being guaranteed by his unique experience rather than by the strength of his personal spiritual convictions.

In the course of Jewish history prophecy and apocalyptic had gradually merged in the message of various preachers of reform. The stress of Syrian and Roman oppression tended constantly to increase the stimulus toward distinctly apocalyptic ways of thinking. It is not surprising to find early Christians embracing these ideas with avidity and using them freely as the solution for their own problems, particularly under such circumstances as those with which the author of Revelation was

confronted. The outstanding features of the apocalyptic program had become well fixed by custom before he undertook the task of writing a new Christian revelation. He moved in the same general circle of ideas as did his predecessors. In standard apocalyptic fashion his message was authenticated from without by marvelous visions. He also viewed the history of the present world in terms of a mighty conflict between Satanic and heavenly powers. Earthly rulers were represented as Satan's especial agents for afflicting the righteous, whose tortures were to increase until the moment for divine action arrived. Then the present world would perish, making way for a new régime of righteousness. While John introduced many original features into his book he still followed the main lines of apocalyptic thinking that had already been mapped out by writers of revelations in previous generations.

III. EQUIPMENT OF THE SEER

Notwithstanding the fact that revelations were composed in accordance with well-established models, it was not thought possible for an ordinary individual to produce one of these books. Since an apocalypse was regarded

as a disclosure of God's secret purposes in history, the author was supposed to need a special equipment for his task. He alone could write who had been divinely instructed in heavenly wisdom.

Dreams were the most common means by which this supernatural wisdom was mediated to the older apocalyptic writers. In a dream the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar received a communication from the other world, the interpretation of which he demanded in vain from his wise men. But when Daniel and his companions sought aid from their God, "then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a vision of the night." On another occasion Daniel had a dream and "visions of his head upon his bed," after which he wrote out the story of what he had seen in the vision that had been shown him in his dream. He describes in very realistic fashion the emotions which stirred within him as he experienced these visions: "My spirit was grieved in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me. I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth concerning all of this. So he told me and made me know the interpretation of the things."[1]

[1] Dan. 7:15 f.

Enoch tells of a dream he had when a boy sleeping at the home of his grandfather. He saw the vault of heaven collapse and fall to the earth, while the earth itself was swallowed up in a great abyss. The sight so terrified the youth that he cried aloud in his sleep, "The earth is destroyed." On being awakened by his grandfather he recounted the dream, and they both agreed that it was a divine disclosure of events presently to overtake the world. Some of the most striking revelations of the Enoch apocalypse were communicated to the seer in a dream.

In "a vision of the night" Baruch has a dream, which God subsequently interprets to him as meaning that the Roman Empire is presently to be supplanted by the new messianic kingdom from heaven. In still another dream Baruch sees an unusual electric storm which awakens him in terror from his sleep. After praying God for an interpretation the angel Ramiel, "who presides over true visions," appears to the seer and explains that the storm symbolizes the history of the world from Adam to the advent of the Messiah. Ezra's faith in the coming Messiah was also derived from dreams. First he saw a terrible eagle, typifying

the Roman Empire, arise out of the sea, and later, in another dream, he beheld the Messiah himself come riding upon the clouds to triumph over Rome. In each case Ezra was sorely perplexed until God explained to him the meaning of the dream.

In all of these descriptions dreams are assumed to be a miraculous disclosure of heavenly wisdom. The ancients knew nothing of our modern science of psychology and the doubt it casts upon those vagrant mental images which register themselves upon the brain during the hours of sleep. The dreamer of olden times assumed that the visions beheld in his dreams corresponded to the actual realities of another world upon which man was only rarely permitted to gaze. The sight was so unusual that it frequently needed interpretation before the wisdom it revealed could be appropriated by mortals. It was the business of the efficient seer to receive and expound these revelations for his less fortunate and less skilful contemporaries.

A closely kindred means of ascertaining divine wisdom is furnished by visions experienced during waking hours. An aptitude for this type of psychic activity is part of the

equipment of many apocalyptists, although the experience is by no means peculiar to them. Their visions belong in essentially the same category as Isaiah's vision of Jehovah sitting upon his throne or Ezekiel's vision of God seen through the open door in the heavens. But in the case of an apocalyptic seer equipment by means of visions is more fully developed. He is privileged to gaze upon picture after picture, which sometimes disclose to him the whole course of past history as well as the outcome of God's plans for the future.

These visions are frequently ecstatic in character. Superhuman knowledge comes to the seer when he is in an abnormally agitated state of feeling. This phenomenon, corresponding with the modern notion of trance, was interpreted by the ancients as a superior state of mental activity induced by supernatural causes; hence the importance of this equipment for the apocalyptist. Numerous illustrations of ecstatic visions could be adduced from various apocalyptic writings. Daniel was subject to great agitation of spirit and on one occasion, after three weeks of meditation and fasting, was visited by heavenly messengers visible to himself but unseen by his companions.

Daniel was quite overcome by the sight of these strange visitors, who communicated great wisdom to him while he was in this ecstatic condition. After a period of seven days of fasting, Baruch heard a voice speaking from the heights instructing him to stand upon his feet and hear the word of the mighty God. On another occasion a similar period of fasting, meditation, and prayer induced an exalted state of feeling in which Baruch saw the heavens opened and power was given him to hear a voice from on high speaking words of heavenly wisdom. Likewise in moments of profound agitation, after periods of fasting and prayer, Ezra communed with the Most High and attained to an understanding of the mysteries of God. Gentile and early Christian apocalypses also exhibit striking instances of trance as the medium of the seer's inspiration.

Still another feature in the equipment of the apocalyptist akin to ecstatic vision is his alleged ability to pay temporary visits to distant places, even to heaven or hell, where he sees and hears divine information to be revealed to mortals. Among the prophets Ezekiel had experienced the sensation of being caught up from earth and transported to a distant place.

As he describes the phenomenon, the Spirit in the form of a hand laid hold of a lock of his hair, raised him into the upper air, and brought him in the visions of God to Jerusalem. The apocalypses contain striking descriptions of such experiences. In one of Daniel's visions it seemed to him as though he were transported to the castle of Susa. Enoch was once borne to heaven on the clouds, surrounded by a mist as he sped upward, driven by the wind, through the regions of the stars and the lightning. The apocalypse known as the Secrets of Enoch especially abounds in references to the seer's journeyings through the heavens. In the Apocalypse of Abraham the ascent to heaven is made on the wings of a bird, while Baruch was raised aloft by a "strong spirit." Visits of exploration to the abodes of the blessed or to the regions of torture are also common in gentile imagery.

Sometimes an apocalyptist believed himself especially equipped by God's spirit to disclose revelations. Daniel was repeatedly credited by his contemporaries with possessing "the spirit of the holy gods" and "an excellent spirit and knowledge and understanding." Enoch was said to have alleged: "The Spirit

is poured out upon me, that I may show you everything that shall befall you forever." But inner spiritual guidance did not play a prominent rôle in the work of the seer; his activities were more emotional and picturesque. While the Spirit might be a means of inducing dreams or ecstatic visions, the seer's chief source of information was the more concrete and objective words or images communicated to him during his visions. The inspiration of the Sibylline prophetess is a striking illustration of a similar phenomenon among the Gentiles.

Friendship with the angels was a particularly important item in the qualifications of the Jewish authors of revelations. At different times Daniel availed himself of their assistance. In Enoch hosts of angels are almost constantly moving about on the stage, while certain of their number serve as guides and interpreters for the seer. The book opens with Enoch's declaration that from angels "I heard everything and from them I understood as I saw." In fact many apocalyptists are similarly assisted by these ministering spirits of heaven.

Convinced of his supernatural equipment, an apocalyptic author usually makes superior claims for the content of his book. He has

acquired his knowledge by means of dreams, ecstatic visions, visits to heaven, and angelic instruction, all of which seem to him real objective occurrences and in no sense subjective psychic phenomena in the modern sense of that term. Under these circumstances it is not surprising to find Enoch affirming that "till the present day such wisdom has never been given by the Lord of Spirits as I have received according to my insight, according to the good pleasure of the Lord of Spirits." A similar assurance of finality pervades all the apocalypses, whether Jewish, gentile, or Christian.

The author of the New Testament Revelation represented himself as falling no whit behind his apocalyptic predecessors and contemporaries in his consciousness of unique equipment for his task. He did not rely upon dreams as the source of heavenly wisdom, but ecstatic visions amply supplied all his needs. When "in the Spirit" he found himself enjoying that elevated state of feeling which enabled him to hear wonderful voices from above and see marvelous sights in heaven. God, Christ, and the angels were all open to his gaze as he received a full disclosure of heavenly wisdom. In this

confidence he informed his readers that his book was "a revelation from Jesus Christ which God gave to him in order to disclose to his servants what must speedily come to pass." So far as his equipment was concerned, in all essential respects John regarded himself as standing in the true line of apocalyptic succession.

IV. LITERARY METHOD OF APOCALYPTIC

The literary processes employed in the actual composition of different revelations varied with circumstances. Possibly the simplest form of the process was a literal reproduction of the dream or vision as recalled by the seer on recovering his normal state of mind. In some instances the actual writing may have been performed while the author was still dominated by his ecstatic feeling. At first these spontaneous methods of composition may have sufficed, but at a relatively early date apocalyptic writings assumed a much more complicated and artificial literary form.

It is often difficult to determine whether the dreams and visions described in certain apocalyptic writings are records of actual experience or whether they are merely the creations of a literary imagination. No one

supposes that Dante and Milton had actual visions of the scenes they depict so vividly, or that Bunyan ever believed his pilgrim to be anything but a creation of his own literary skill. Are the scenes described in the apocalypses a similarly imaginative product of the writer's art, designed to convey entertainment and instruction, but never intended by him as descriptions of actual happenings? In their present form the apocalyptic books betray varying degrees of literary skill in their composition, and possibly the dream or vision therein described may often be a creation of the author's pen rather than a reproduction of his personal experience.

On the other hand, a close inspection of apocalyptic writings forbids the supposition that their authors commonly regarded themselves as composing a mere literary fiction. For the most part they were highly emotional men who lived in the midst of stirring events and belonged to an age which did not question the objective reality of dreams and ecstatic visions. For the writer of Daniel the advent of the Kingdom of God to displace the Syrian rule was to be as literally real as were the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes. And

just as God himself was supposed to be able at the present moment to see clearly the whole course of future history, so a seer under divine instruction presumably could attain, and often did attain in his own opinion, a literal vision of these coming events. In the primitive stages of their history apocalyptic expectations undoubtedly drew their inspiration very largely from the realm of actual dreams and ecstasies.

With the development of interest in apocalyptic writings and the growing demand for books of this type, the literary method employed in their composition inevitably became more artificial. A revelation no longer consisted in the simple rehearsal of a seer's experiences. It became an elaborate document composed by a literary artist, who himself might be somewhat familiar with dreams or visions, but who deliberately rearranged, expounded, interpreted, and wove into a unified whole data from his own experience, creations of his own literary imagination, and materials from earlier apocalyptic documents or oral traditions.

Few if any of the extant Jewish apocalypses are entirely new compositions, giving at first hand the work of a single author. On the contrary, many of these documents are com-

posed of earlier and briefer apocalypses to which a subsequent writer has added later materials of his own creation, blending together these complex elements as best he could into a more or less perfectly unified whole. Undoubtedly these earlier revelations which he read until they indelibly impressed themselves upon his mind had much to do with stimulating his own imagination and begetting those ecstatic emotions which inspired his own fresh efforts at apocalyptic composition. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that the growth of literary inventiveness lessened the seriousness of the apocalyptist's purpose or weakened his confidence in the ultimate triumph of righteousness depicted in his book. He wrote under the firm conviction that he was correctly interpreting the intentions of the Almighty.

A characteristic literary device for emphasizing the authority and validity of a revelation is the custom of ascribing it to some ancient worthy. Jewish apocalypses were commonly of this pseudonymous character. The unknown author of the so-called Book of Daniel, living in the days of the Syrian persecution, about 167 B.C., composed his book to represent the experiences of Daniel, who was assumed to

have lived some four hundred years earlier in the time of the Babylonian exile. Similarly, different apocalyptic writers in the second and first centuries B.C. put forth their revelations as dreams and visions of the patriarch Enoch. Moses and Abraham were likewise honored with the authorship of books which were not written before the beginning of the Christian Era. After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. apocalypses were published under the names of Baruch and Ezra, who had lived centuries before these books were composed.

At first glance this habit of issuing a book under an assumed name may seem to be a most deceptive and reprehensible practice. But we must remember that the literary ethics of two thousand years ago was very different from that of today. The seer was not uttering his own message but the message of God, a direct revelation from heaven, and it seemed to him to be his primary duty to deliver this message in the form that would be most effective for his readers. This end could be best accomplished, so he usually assumed, by putting forth his book in the name of some ancient worthy like Daniel, Enoch, Moses, Abraham, Baruch, or Ezra. This pious de-

ception was perpetrated in all good conscience, not so much with the intention of deceiving the readers as with the purpose of providing fitting credentials for a new divine communication.

Before the chief Jewish apocalypses had been composed the idea of a sacred canon of Hebrew scriptures had already come into existence. Hence a seer who wrote in his own name could not hope to secure for his revelation adequate recognition from his contemporaries, who now regarded antiquity as necessary to the divine authority of a document. Under these circumstances, in order to obtain proper respect for his divine message the apocalyptist must write in the name of some honored individual of ancient times. This device also enabled him to include in his visions the course of history that had intervened between his own day and that of the assumed ancient author. As the real author and his contemporaries observed the historical accuracy of this supposed forecast of the past, they were inspired with greater confidence in the reliability of the apocalyptist's outlook upon the future. Indeed the seer himself may have believed that what he wrote had really been revealed in former

times to the worthies of old, and that he was but repeating what they could have written had they chosen to compose apocalypses.

Apocalyptic writers employed other literary devices of a varied character for heightening the effect of their message. A free use of allegory is one of the most noteworthy features of apocalyptic style. Instead of explicitly referring to concrete historical incidents, the seer uses symbolic language, leaving it to the imagination of his reader to observe the actual connection between the content of his vision and the specific events of history with which the vision is concerned. In earlier times the prophets had occasionally employed a simple form of allegory to give added effectiveness to their utterances. Amos, for example, instead of designating the actual foe who was thought to endanger Israel's safety, merely warned his audience that Jehovah had revealed to him impending disaster symbolized in a vision by destructive locusts, a devouring fire, or a threatening plumbline. Similarly Jeremiah did not specify the name of the enemy that threatened the destruction of Judea, but used instead the allegorical image of the boiling caldron to symbolize the evil that would

presently break forth from the north upon all the inhabitants of the land.

In the hands of apocalyptic writers allegorical imagery underwent an extreme development, being freely used to depict events of the past, the present, and the future. By this means the author of Daniel cast a reverential air of mystery about his narrative of Jewish history from the time of the Exile to the days of Antiochus Epiphanes. Instead of merely designating by name the successive kingdoms of the Babylonians, Medes, Persians, and Macedonians, a heightened effectiveness for his narrative was secured by symbolic descriptions of four beasts, whom his original readers would easily recognize as typical of these four great world-powers. Coming events were also depicted allegorically. The death of Antiochus and the consequent triumph of the Jewish people were described under the imagery of a slain beast on the one hand and a glorious heavenly creature like unto a son of man on the other. Throughout the whole range of Jewish apocalyptic literature, allegory was a characteristic means of alluding to historical events.

The apocalyptists may often seem to revel in allegorical symbolism merely for its own

sake, yet it should always be remembered that there is a large measure of historical reality beneath much of their extravagant imagery. The historical incidents to which they allude are not always apparent to later generations, but to readers of their own time the meaning of their symbols was doubtless self-evident in view of the specific conditions which called a particular apocalypse into existence. Thus allegory served both to veil and to reveal the seer's message. Those persons like-minded with himself, who belonged to his own group, would read his words not only with ready apprehension but with a sympathy and freedom that would enable them to supplement or reinterpret his imagery to suit their own flights of fancy, while to the uninitiated his book would be desirably obscure.

On the other hand one must not suppose that every item in apocalyptic symbolism was intended to represent a specific historical event. These writers did not limit their art to careful portraiture. They often invented freely and inserted in their paintings many details with no purpose other than that of extravagant ornamentation. Often their interest was similar to that of the myth-maker who is borne

aloft on the wings of his imagination until the realities of the experience which he originally sought to interpret have been quite lost from view. This was particularly true in the case of an apocalyptist who freely employed traditional imagery the original significance of which he often no longer knew, but which he used because of its currency or because it appealed to his fancy. Naturally this feature is more pronounced in the later apocalypses, where inheritances from earlier writings and even contributions from current mythical stories become a part of the seer's equipment. Hence it is not always possible to ascribe a specific meaning to every item in apocalyptic imagery. Certain of its elements often have a long history, of which even the author himself may have been wholly ignorant. But even the unknown had its value for him, perhaps just because it was pervaded by an air of mystery and solemnity.

Apocalyptic writers also show a fondness for speculating in numbers, in which they sometimes discern a hidden significance. The seventy weeks mentioned in Jeremiah furnished the author of Daniel a model for his artificial subdivision of the course of history from the

Exile to the end of the present age.[1] Similarly one of the Enoch apocalypses divides the whole course of history into ten world-weeks, each apparently subdivided into seven weeks of years. Baruch notes twelve clouds and twelve signs of the end, while Ezra's eagle has twelve large and eight small wings. These instances are merely typical of the fondness for repetition and interpretation of numbers shown by different authors of apocalypses.

The use of obscure expressions and circumlocutions is another means sometimes employed to add mystery and solemnity to the seer's language. Thus Daniel, instead of plainly mentioning the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus, prefers to speak of the "abomination that maketh desolate." And he designates the three and a half years of the final distress by the enigmatical expression "time, times, and a half." Even the seer himself is represented as unable to comprehend this solemn mystery: "I heard but I understood not. Then said I, O my lord, what shall be the issue of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed till the time of the end."[2] Yet in the same breath

[1] See above, p. 72, n. 1. [2] Dan. 12:8 f.

his angelic informant specifies "a thousand two hundred and ninety days" as the duration of affliction. Doubtless some of the phraseology contained in apocalypses was intended by the authors to be vague or incomprehensible, and in fact may have been such to the writers themselves. But for that very reason obscure expressions may frequently have been cherished as having a peculiar sanctity.

Prayers and hymns constitute another impressive feature of apocalyptic style. Daniel furnishes a typical illustration of prayer as a means employed by the seer for attaining unto a new revelation:

> While I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel . . . . touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he instructed me and talked with me and said, O Daniel . . . . at the beginning of thy supplications the commandment went forth and I am come to tell thee, for thou art greatly beloved. Therefore consider the matter and understand the vision.

In the Apocalypse of Baruch the seer frequently appeals to the Lord in prayer, and the first vision of Ezra is prefaced by a lengthy supplication for divine assistance to explain the reasons for the Jews' terrible afflictions.

The hymns of seraphim or angelic choirs also add to the magnificence of apocalyptic scenery. A model for this feature of apocalyptic was furnished by Isaiah's vision of the seraphic choir which sang antiphonally: "Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."[1] On beholding the glories of heaven Enoch "cried with a loud voice, with the spirit of power, and blessed and glorified and extolled." This same apocalypse also describes the great hymn of triumph to be sung in honor of the Lord of Spirits on the day of judgment, when all the hosts of heaven and earth shall exclaim with one voice:

> Blessed is he, and may the name of the Lord of spirits be blessed forever and ever. All who sleep not above in heaven shall bless him, all the holy ones who are in heaven shall bless him, and all the elect who dwell in the garden of life. And every spirit of light who is able to bless and glorify and extol and hallow thy blessed name, and all flesh shall beyond measure glorify and bless thy name forever and ever.

V. THE COMPOSITION OF JOHN'S APOCALYPSE

The Revelation of John exhibits in its structure the same general literary traits that

[1] Isa. 6:3

mark representative Jewish apocalypses. In both form and content it follows lines with which the Jews and early Christians had been made familiar by the Book of Daniel and its numerous successors. Following the example of his predecessors John wrote under the pressure of a very specific demand of the hour, he moved freely in the realm of customary apocalyptic thinking, and he shared in full the characteristic ecstatic equipment which especially authenticated a seer.

The Johannine revelation, however, belongs to that type of apocalypse in which literary artifice is most pronounced. A summary of its contents discloses a comparatively highly developed literary structure. The book opens with a specific title, informing readers that it contains a revelation from heaven especially communicated to the author for the benefit of those who wish to learn of events that are shortly coming to pass (1:1–3). In characteristic epistolary fashion John addresses a greeting to the principal churches of the Roman province of Asia, where he expects the book to circulate (1:4–8). At the outset he clearly states his theme by an emphatic declaration of belief in the early and visible coming of Christ.

As a further preparation for the proper reception of his message, John describes at some length the unique equipment divinely vouchsafed to him for the performance of his responsible task (1:9–20). While "in the Spirit" he had been transported to heaven, where he was admitted into the very presence of Christ, who explicitly commissioned him to write the apocalypse.

The first section in the main body of the work consists of admonitions to the seven churches of Asia (chaps. 2 f.). These several communities are variously congratulated for their fidelity, reproved for their shortcomings, and exhorted to institute such moral or spiritual reforms as will properly fit them for the imminent advent of Christ. John utters his impressive messages of warning or consolation, not merely on his own authority, but rather as an expression of the will of heaven.

After admonishing his readers to purify themselves for the speedy coming of Christ, John proceeds to assure them of an early deliverance from the oppressions of Rome. The ground of this hope is the very power of heaven itself. God and Christ are to intervene on their behalf by instituting a mighty judgment upon the Roman Empire. In order to

convince his readers that the heavenly powers are fully equal to this task, John describes the glories of heaven as revealed to him in the ecstasy of visions (chaps. 4 f.). First he portrays the majesty of God, who is seen sitting upon his throne, surrounded by his royal subordinates, the whole scene exhibiting an imperial authority vastly greater than that of any Roman emperor. The effect is further heightened by a vision of the heavenly dignity of Christ, who is to be the specific agent of God in accomplishing the deliverance of Christians. When Christ appears upon the scene in heaven, exhibiting his ability to open the sealed book, the entire angelic host unites with the members of the royal court in rendering him fulsome praise as the one who possesses transcendent glory and power. John's confidence is made doubly strong by the vision of a final outburst of praise uttered by all creation in acknowledgment of the unsurpassable glory attaching to the combined power of God and Christ. By this heavenly demonstration John would assure his readers that the speedy overthrow of hostile Rome was inevitable.

Having affirmed his confidence in the heavenly powers that will ultimately insure

the triumph of the Christian cause, John enters upon a description of the aggravation of distresses to precede the end (chaps. 6 f.). These also are revealed to him in a series of visions as the successive seals of the heavenly book were broken by Christ. The opening of each seal discloses a new form of affliction presently to overtake the inhabitants of the Roman world. But amid these portrayals of approaching calamity John is shown a picture insuring the safety of the saints, who remain true to Christ throughout all their trials. Clothed in white robes and carrying palms in their hands the company of the redeemed is seen in the act of rendering praise to God and to Christ, while angels join in the chorus, making special declaration of the almighty glory and power of God, who is the ultimate source of salvation. The blessed estate of the redeemed is glowingly described. They will remain under the constant protection of God, while Christ will devote himself especially to their care.

The opening of the seventh seal discloses to John a new vision of tragic events to occur in the last times (chaps. 8–11). He beholds seven angels with trumpets, standing ready to

give the signal for letting loose a succession of calamities upon mortals. First will come a series of four preliminary agonies in the form of a destructive electric storm, a volcanic eruption, an injury to rivers and springs, and a diminution in the brightness of sun, moon, and stars. These milder forms of affliction are to be followed by three more deadly "woes." Monstrous demonic creatures released from the lower world will torture mankind for a period of five months, Christians alone being delivered from their power. The second woe will come from the east, whence a horde of monstrous horsemen will swarm forth to overrun the Roman Empire. The third woe is to be the execution of God's final judgment upon the heathen.

Following this general sketch of the fate to overtake the wicked Roman world, John offers a somewhat more detailed and interpretative description of events to attend the final destruction of evil. He reminds his readers that the real source of the world's troubles is the activity of demonic powers (chaps. 12 f.). The agonies of the last times will be occasioned by the final effort of these Satanic forces to possess themselves of the

whole world. As John pictures this final struggle it is not simply a conflict between Christians and pagans, but a deadly combat between the powers of heaven and the powers of hell. With the failure of Satan's efforts to extend his power heavenward, he seeks to wreak his vengeance upon mortals, and thus the final period of tribulation is inaugurated. As a phase of this activity Satanic power becomes incarnate in the imperial beast, who presides over the government of the Roman Empire and seeks to impose worship of himself upon all his subjects.

Turning from this picture of the final outburst of demonic activity, the seer is permitted to gaze upon new scenes exhibiting the triumph of the saints and the utter destruction of Rome (chaps. 14–18). He hears heavenly voices pronouncing doom not only upon Rome itself but upon all those inhabitants of the Empire who yield to the demands of the imperial cult. John's vision reveals successive stages in the manifestations of divine wrath preliminary to the complete destruction of the great pagan city, which is figuratively designated as Babylon, the wicked woman full of abominations, and drunk with the blood of the saints

and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. But she is destined for early destruction. In John's very presence angelic voices pronounce imminent and irrevocable doom upon all of her activities. Her commerce, her wealth, her ornaments, her luxuries, and her power are to perish in the twinkling of an eye, when God shall render unto her a double punishment for all her iniquities.

Since Rome had become the special agent of Satan in his efforts to secure control of the world, the utter destruction of the city was a severe blow to his ambitions. But the triumph of righteousness was not yet fully accomplished, nor could victory be complete until the remaining power of Satan had been crushed. A vivid forecast of this final consummation was also exhibited to John (19:1—22:5). Christ would descend in the rôle of conquering hero and wreak a fearful vengeance upon his remaining enemies. So deadly would be the slaughter that none would survive. The imperial beast, that is, the last emperor, who apparently had escaped Rome's downfall, and the priest of his cult who had forced worship of the ruler upon men, alone would be saved for eternal punishment in the fiery lake of

burning brimstone. Satan would be firmly locked down in the lower regions for a thousand years, while martyred Christians who had refused to worship the emperor would enjoy a period of millennial bliss with Christ on earth. The millennium would be followed by a temporary release of Satan, when he would make his last futile effort at self-assertion, resulting in his complete downfall. Then God's judgment throne would be set up on earth, the dead would be raised, rewards and punishments would be decreed, and the righteous would dwell forever with God in the new Jerusalem.

In order to impress readers with the reliability of his message, John concludes by reaffirming its heavenly origin (22:6–17). Once more his visions are declared to have been received by angelic mediation from the God of the spirits of the prophets. Convinced that he has obtained the content of his apocalypse from this heavenly source, he believes it to be an absolute guaranty of Christ's imminent advent. In this confidence he solemnly admonishes his contemporaries to accept without question or alteration his interpretation of the future (22:18 f.). So certain is he of the

accuracy of his forecast that he pronounces doom upon everyone who dares to disagree with him, whether by adding to or subtracting from the elaborate apocalyptic program which he has outlined. Such were the assurances offered by John to the persecuted Christians of Asia as an encouragement to fidelity in the hour of their testing.

The foregoing analysis of the Book of Revelation shows that it was constructed in accordance with a well-designed plan. Its constituent materials were carefully selected and arranged to accomplish a definite purpose, which the author kept constantly in mind throughout the entire book. Its structural unity and symmetrical arrangement prove it to have been a studied composition of a literary artist of high order among apocalyptic writers. No other apocalyptist exhibits clearer evidences of strength of personality or a more manifest power of originality in meeting the demands of a specific historic crisis. While John writes with the characteristic unction of a seer moved by ecstatic zeal and reveling in marvelous visions, his book is no haphazard reproduction of habitual trance experiences. On the contrary, as it now stands Revelation is manifestly

the studious work of sober and industrious hours applied to the production of a carefully planned literary composition. Although it purports to be just one continuous description of things seen and heard in marvelous visions, nevertheless the underlying didactic design is perfectly apparent. To this the author necessarily gave not a little serious thought both in determining the content of his argument and in working out the form of its presentation.

The evident fact of literary design underlying the composition of Revelation should not blind one to the seriousness of the author's purpose nor to the element of realism in his book. He wrote under a strain of intense emotion and out of a vital experience rarely equaled and probably never excelled by any of his apocalyptic predecessors. He had been mightily moved by the pressure of extraordinary circumstances, which had exerted a very immediate and powerful influence upon his own life. Driven to action by Rome's hostility toward Christians, he displayed a realism that would hardly have been possible had his incentive been merely the production of an entertaining piece of literature. Although he

freely indulged in some very daring flights of fancy, he did not employ apocalyptic imagery primarily to gratify an extravagant literary taste either on his own part or on the part of his readers. He did not aim to write a popular religious novel. From first to last his chief purpose was to interpret the very real facts of a most trying experience through which he and his fellow-Christians were passing when Revelation was composed.

Are the visions described in Revelation wholly a product of deliberate literary invention, or do they at least to some extent represent real ecstatic experiences on the part of the author? While in its composition the book exhibits unmistakable evidences of skilful deliberation, nevertheless the ultimate source of much of the author's apocalyptic imagery should undoubtedly be sought in real visions incited by the stirring events of the times. The strenuous experiences through which Christians were passing as a result of their refusal to worship the emperor inevitably gave fresh stimulus to the emotional side of religious life, which was already so pronounced a feature of early Christianity. As a missionary leader among Gentiles, Paul had shown himself to be

a man of visions and revelations,[1] and even among the rank and file of the Christian community at Corinth ecstasy occupied a prominent place.[2] Doubtless groups of believers in Ephesus and other Asian cities enjoyed a similar sense of emotional elevation ascribed to possession by the new Christian Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit to produce ecstatic experiences was thought by the author of Acts to have been a special possession of Christians ever since the time of their first Pentecostal endowment. John "in the Spirit" on the island of Patmos and under the peculiar tensity of emotion induced by resisting the aggressions of the imperial cult would undoubtedly share in full measure the highly prized privilege of receiving new revelations and visions as realistic phenomena of ecstatic religious experience.

This sense of inner certainty is further evinced by the fact that John wrote in his own name instead of employing the name of an ancient worthy to authenticate his revelation. There is no good reason to doubt the genuineness of the author's reference to himself as "John, your brother" who wrote his book under

[1] II Cor. 12:1–5. [2] I Cor., chaps. 12–14.

the conviction that the Spirit authorized him to communicate this message to his suffering fellow-Christians. Any Christian who experienced in his own religious life the new emotional elevation which belief in the heavenly Christ made possible was regarded in Christian circles as possessing an immediate authority quite equal or even superior to that of any Old Testament worthy. Moreover, at the time Revelation was written no distinctively Christian collection of books had yet been assembled into a canon of Scripture set apart as peculiarly authoritative on the ground that these documents were connected with the names of the primitive apostles. Even if the John of Revelation was one of the Twelve, a question about which there is much uncertainty,[1] it is particularly noteworthy that he makes no use of any such official prerogative to win a hearing for his words. He assumes that the simple mention of himself as "your brother" who received his revelation "in the Spirit" will seem to his readers a fully adequate authentication for his book.

John's task as an author was to give concrete and orderly verbal expression to convictions

[1] See below, pp. 200 ff.

acquired through the elusive medium of ecstatic visions. Paul had excused himself from undertaking a similar task on the ground that things heard by him on a certain occasion when he had been caught up into Paradise were "unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter."[1] But John believed that the Spirit had explicitly ordered the publication of the wisdom revealed to him in his visions. Hence he carefully composed an apocalypse employing the literary methods characteristic of this type of writing. The details of his visions were elaborately worked out, and the whole was skilfully arranged according to a definite plan in order to accomplish a specific didactic purpose. Thus both ecstatic experience and literary artifice made their respective contributions toward the genesis of his book.

Certain outstanding characteristics of John's literary method are especially worthy of the interpreter's attention. In the first place the seer's visions refer only to recent and anticipated occurrences. Unlike many of his Jewish predecessors he makes no attempt to give verisimilitude to his revelation by prophesying events already passed. Since he was writing

[1] II Cor. 12:4.

in his own name it was not possible to assume the rôle of an ancient prophet, and the consciousness of immediate spiritual authentication rendered unnecessary any resort to this familiar device of Jewish apocalyptic. Under these circumstances John centered his attention upon the interpretation of contemporary and impending events. His visions are concerned with the status of Christian communities threatened by Roman persecution, with the grounds of Christian confidence in the hour of danger, with the increase of troubles to be anticipated for the near future, with the imminent downfall of the Roman Empire, with the victorious return of the heavenly Christ, and with the ultimate establishment of the new heaven and the new earth.

John's predominant interest in the present and the future does not, however, involve a complete break with the past in the sense that earlier apocalyptic literature and thinking contributed nothing to the making of his revelation. Quite the opposite is the fact. While undoubtedly there is a large element of originality in his work, involving as it does distinctly new themes and problems, it is not an absolutely new creation. Even items derived directly from

the actual ecstatic visions of the author would owe not a little to the suggestiveness of existing apocalyptic tradition with which John was already familiar. Acquaintance with this type of Jewish thinking would certainly equip him for, if indeed it may not have been an important factor in inducing, the state of mind that made possible his visions. And those portions of his apocalypse, constituting undoubtedly the greater part of his book, which owe their immediate form to the more sober processes of literary composition are found to contain not a few inherited elements even after the greatest possible allowance has been made for the original genius of the author.

Certain general respects in which Revelation shows itself to have been a genuine heir of the great apocalyptic inheritance have already been noted. In subsequent study of the text specific items of this inheritance will be examined as occasion may require. For the present it will suffice to observe the varied extent of the materials available for John's use. That he was familiar with Jewish apocalyptic documents is beyond question, and his large debt to Jewish predecessors is equally certain. In fact some students of the book have supposed

that large sections of the text were taken over bodily or in slightly revised form from existing Jewish apocalypses. This is probably an overstatement of the fact. Against any such theory of mechanical compilation one must set the distinct unity of purpose and style as well as the consistent plan that pervades the book. Perhaps more significant still as an evidence of essential literary unity is the persistent protest against emperor-worship which colors every part of Revelation. For Jews, at least, worship of the Roman emperor was never a sufficiently crucial problem to call forth extensive apocalyptic documents of the type that would have been suitable to John's needs. While his debt to Jewish antecedents is undoubtedly extensive, it belongs more largely in the realm of appropriated imagery and modes of thought than in the sphere of direct literary dependence.

John, however, was not the first Christian interested in apocalyptic, nor is he likely to have been the first to compose some sort of revelation. In fact early Christian literature, as has already been pointed out, contains examples of this class of writing already in existence before John's day. And it is not inconceivable that he may have found in

circulation certain shorter apocalypses of early Christian seers which he could use in the preparation of his book in somewhat the same way that the authors of Matthew and Luke used Mark. Indeed, attempts have been made to discover in Revelation one or more original Christian documents later supplemented and revised by an editor. But the theory encounters grave difficulties. For its positive basis it rests upon certain alleged illogical connections and inconsistencies observable in different parts of the book. These phenomena, however, may be merely characteristic of John's own mental processes and not at all the result of awkward literary compilation. Moreover, the pronounced unity of interest and general aim transcending all minor inconsistencies counts strongly in favor of the opinion that Revelation is mainly the literary work of a single hand. The pervasive motif is everywhere to interpret the conflict between Christianity and the Roman state due to the aggression of the imperial cult. Apparently this topic had not become a crucial one for Christians previous to John's day. Even in Nero's persecution refusal to worship the emperor had not been the issue, and there is no indication that this demand had

been pressed upon Christians prior to the time of Domitian. It is therefore quite unlikely that John would have found ready at hand any very extensive Christian apocalyptic literature dealing with the particular theme in which he was interested.

In treating Revelation as a first-hand product of John's own pen, one should not forget that the author was employing the familiar paraphernalia of earlier Jewish and Christian apocalyptic, which furnished both inspiration and models for his own composition. Nor is it improbable that he would to some extent appropriate apocalyptic oracles known to him either in written form or through oral transmission. In a few instances the presence of such erratic blocks of floating tradition may have to be assumed as the most plausible explanation of certain minor obscurities or inconsistencies in the text. Apocalyptic writers did not always regard intelligibility as the highest criterion of value in their books, and the very obscurity of an oracular utterance seems sometimes to have lent it a mysterious solemnity which was especially prized. But these features in Revelation may often be due to John's free use of current traditional imagery

rather than to any slavish reproduction of fragmentary written apocalypses.

Popular gentile imagery was also taken over by John. He pictures the imperial beast of the last times as a reincarnation of a former emperor.[1] Not only was belief in the reincarnation of souls a characteristic gentile notion, but manifestly John is appropriating the current legends regarding Nero's return to establish himself in power once more over the Roman Empire. Again, in reserving eternal punishment for the beast and his priest and Satan, John may be following the gentile precedent of consigning only the greatest sinners to everlasting torture. Indeed, it may be that a comparatively large amount of the fantastic imagery displayed in many of John's pictures was derived from, or at least suggested by, traditional mythological ideas current in the author's gentile environment.

In general the genetic forces entering into the making of the New Testament Revelation were similar both in variety and in form to those affecting the composition of its principal Jewish predecessors. It too was an elaborate document representing a studied literary effort

[1] Rev. 13:3; 17:11.

on the part of its author. Although possessing personal experience in the realm of ecstatic visions, when writing his book he deliberately selected, arranged, and interpreted a variety of materials. The completed book combined items from his ecstatic experience, elements created by his own skill in literary invention, data from current apocalyptic tradition whether oral or written in form, and suggestions derived from fanciful imagery belonging to the mythology of the contemporary gentile world.

On its more formal side Revelation was composed in accordance with the methods commonly employed by apocalyptic writers of the period. The literary form of vision is preserved throughout and the standard devices for creating a heightened air of mysterious solemnity abound. Allegory is used as a means of referring to contemporary history. The Roman rulers are never mentioned by name, and Rome herself is symbolically designated as a wicked woman and as "Babylon the great." But when this Babylon is said to be drunken with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, John's persecuted fellow-Christians of Asia would have no difficulty in recognizing the meaning of his allegorical allusions. To

the uninitiated such language might be meaningless, but to those for whom Revelation was written allegory did not hide, but rather heightened, the significance of the author's message.

Since John's visions deal so largely with future events, it is not possible to make all of his allegorical statements refer to specifically known historical incidents. Nevertheless it would be quite unfair to him if one failed to recognize the seriousness of his effort to depict specific future occurrences in which he himself had implicit faith. He did not use allegorical imagery as a cloak for uncertainty when describing anticipated events of future history. The downfall of Rome and the coming of Christ are as real for him as if he had said "Rome" instead of "Babylon," and had called Christ by name instead of referring to him in a roundabout way as "the faithful and true," "the Word of God." In apocalypses such language is designed to heighten the effect and make more vivid the scene described, but not to suggest any note of unreality. It is only to later generations of readers, no longer familiar with the author's environment, that his words become obscure. To them his

meaning might have been more clear had he used plain words instead of allegorical allusions, but such was not the case with his original readers. For himself and his anxious contemporaries the coming events pictorially described in his visions were just as real, and as integral an item of history in the near future, as were the afflictions with which Christians were threatened when Revelation was composed.

On the other hand, in Revelation as in Jewish apocalypses it would be futile to insist that every item of apocalyptic imagery contains an allusion to some specific incident or character in present or future history. Probably many features in the pictures painted by the seer were intended to serve merely as ornamentation. John also follows Jewish precedent in his fondness for significant numbers, seven being an especial favorite. There are seven churches, seven lampstands, seven stars, seven spirits of God, seven lamps, seven seals, seven eyes and seven horns of the Lamb, seven angels with trumpets, seven angels with bowls, seven plagues, seven heads of the dragon, seven heads of the scarlet beast, seven mountains, seven kings. Three, four, ten, twelve, and certain of their multiples

also occur frequently, in fact so frequently that their use must be regarded as a deliberate feature in the literary style of the author.

John is particularly fond of circumlocutions employed to lend an atmosphere of mysterious elevation to his descriptions. Prayer imagery on the other hand is quite generally avoided, although there is a reference to the souls of the slain underneath an altar in heaven calling for vengeance.[1] But Revelation is remarkable for its numerous hymns. After the model of the seraphim in Isaiah, four heavenly creatures hover around the throne of God constantly chanting the "Holy, holy, holy." On various occasions angelic choirs praise the glorious majesty of God and Christ, while at other times the redeemed break forth in song. Possibly most of these hymns that emerge so spontaneously upon the pages of the apocalypse were already familiar to John from their frequent use in the public worship of the Christian gatherings.

Thus a great complexity of factors must be kept in mind when endeavoring to picture the situation which brought about the composition of the Book of Revelation. But for the

[1] Rev. 6:9 f.

purposes of correct interpretation it is of primary importance to appreciate the specific historical conditions that prompted John's activity, and to understand the general method of literary procedure followed in the production of all apocalypses and particularly those of Jewish origin. With these facts constantly in mind one may readily pass to a more detailed study of the Johannine apocalypse.

CHAPTER IV

WARNINGS TO THE CHURCHES (REV., CHAPS. 1–3)

The first section of John's Revelation describes a vision of the heavenly Christ from whom the seer received a message for each of seven selected churches in the province of Asia. After a brief paragraph of introduction defining the general character of the book (1:1–3) and a few words of greeting to the readers (1:4–8) the author gives a detailed account of the vision which equipped him for the work of a genuine apocalyptic seer (1:9–20). Having thus demonstrated his claim to speak with authority, he delivers the message which he, as spokesman for the heavenly Christ, sends to the several Christian groups in Ephesus (2:1–7), Smyrna (2:8–11), Pergamum (2:12–17), Thyatira (2:18–29), Sardis (3:1–6), Philadelphia (3:7–13), and Laodicea (3:14–22).

I. TITLE OF THE BOOK (1:1–3)

1:1 *A revelation from Jesus Christ which God gave to him in order to disclose to his servants what must speedily come to pass. And Jesus through his*

angel communicated the revelation to his servant
2 *John who bore witness to all things that he saw,*
to the word spoken by God and the testimony given
3 *by Jesus Christ. Blessed is he who reads and*
they who listen to the reading of this prophecy and
lay to heart what is here recorded, for the time of
its fulfilment is near.

With these words John introduces his book to the Christian public of his day. Title and preface are combined in one paragraph. Probably this introductory statement was prefixed after the rest of the book had been completed and shortly before it was given to the messenger for delivery to the different congregations addressed. A more fitting preface could hardly be imagined. The opening sentences set before the eye of the reader the controlling interest of the whole book, which is specifically designed to cheer and strengthen the Asiatic Christians of that day to endure patiently both present and impending afflictions. John assures them that the end of evil days is near. He is confident that through sudden intervention by the heavenly powers the present period of distress will be brought to an early close.

The ground of hope is clearly stated. God, Christ, and an angelic assistant have united in

the work of revealing to John a picture of coming deliverance. Now he is qualified to communicate this heavenly information to his fellow-Christians. Strengthened by the hope which his recent experiences have inspired within his own breast, he pronounces a blessing upon everyone who will show sufficient interest in the book to bring it to the attention of others by reading it aloud at Christian gatherings. Those who listen are also promised a blessing, provided they are willing to accept as confidently as John does the future program outlined in his book.

Thus John regards his message as both a revelation (vs. 1) and a prophecy (vs. 3). It is a revelation because he believes it to contain superhuman wisdom disclosed to him from heaven. He has acquired information in visions; he saw and therefore he knows. In bearing witness to truth that has been thus marvelously revealed, he feels amply justified in forecasting future events and in requiring that his readers regulate their conduct according to his demands. In assuming this comprehensive rôle John undertakes to discharge the functions of both seer and prophet.

The prophet was a familiar figure among the early Christians, a fact not always appreciated

by moderns, accustomed as they are to apply the term more exclusively to Old Testament worthies. The most explicit account of the Christian prophets and their activities is given by Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians. Among those Christians who exhibit evidence of possessing a unique spiritual endowment, prophets occupy the place of honor next to apostles.[1] Prophecy was a spiritual manifestation especially commended by Paul, because of the beneficial results attending the exercise of this gift. Under the prompting of the Spirit the prophet uttered words of hidden wisdom or exhortation serving to edify the faithful and convict sinners.[2] As a man who spoke at the behest of the Spirit he was given the right of way in the Christian assemblies. But when his neighbor was suddenly moved by a similar impulse to announce a revelation made to him by the Spirit, the former speaker had to give place to his brother-prophet.[3] Corinth was not the only place where Christian prophets were to be found. On one occasion they were present at Antioch in Syria, having come thither from Jerusalem. Among them was a certain Agabus,

[1] I Cor. 12:4–11, 27–30.

[2] I Cor. 14:1–6, 24 f. [3] I Cor. 14:29–33.

who predicted an approaching famine and also announced that Paul would be apprehended by the Jews at Jerusalem. On each of these occasions the power of foresight on the part of Agabus was credited to the presence of the Spirit.[1]

John apparently belonged to this well-recognized class of prophets[2] to be found in many early Christian communities. From time to time as the Spirit came upon them they uttered forceful words of warning or encouragement in the meetings of the congregation. But John's circumstances made it impossible for him to address his brethren in person. If they were still to benefit by his advice he must adopt an indirect method of instruction, committing to writing his revelations and predictions to be read by another in his absence. Apparently he was aware of the danger that the written word read aloud to the congregation by a third party might seem far less forceful than the personal utterance of the enthusiastic prophet speaking under the manifest unction of the Spirit's power. Therefore at the outset he sought to impress upon those who read and those who listened

[1] Acts 11:27 f.; 21:10 f.; see also 13:1; 15:32.

[2] This is implied also in Rev. 19:10; 22:9.

that the authority of heaven was behind his message, and that, though written, it was a truly prophetic word emanating from one who had shared in full those visions and revelations which were the privilege of the Spirit-filled prophet.

II. GREETINGS TO THE READERS (1:4–8)

1:4 *John to the seven churches in Asia: Grace and peace be to you from the one who is and who was and who is coming, and from the seven spirits*
5 *that are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and who has cleansed us of our sins with*
6 *his blood and made us a kingdom of priests for his God and Father, to him be the glory and the power throughout eternity. Amen.*
7 *Look, he comes upon the clouds and every eye shall see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him. Verily, Amen.*
8 *I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, the one who is and who was and who is coming, the Almighty.*

When John sent a written message to his fellow-sufferers he was following a custom

already familiar to Christians. From the first, adherents of the new religious movement had shown a deep interest in the common welfare. When a community was overtaken by trouble neighboring Christians frequently expressed keen interest in the well-being of their afflicted brethren. Sometimes a prominent leader would visit the churches in distress, but in cases where a personal visit was impossible a written communication would be dispatched. The best-known examples of this practice are the Pauline letters written to different Christian groups at times when the apostle found it impracticable to go in person to the scene of the trouble.

Similarly John resorted to letter-writing. He begins with the customary form of Christian address, admirably illustrated in the Pauline epistles, greeting the recipients with the familiar wish that the favor and peace of heaven may rest upon them. But John's missive is far less direct and personal than are the letters of Paul. In fact Revelation is a letter only in its formal introduction and conclusion, while in content it is a collection of prophetic utterances regarding current and impending events, such as the prophetic exhorter might have delivered orally, though less systematically organized, at various

times when moved by the Spirit to speak in the presence of the congregations.

The source of heavenly favor and blessing for Christians is declared to be threefold: (1) God, (2) his seven attendant spirits, and (3) Jesus Christ. But so simple a statement of the matter is not to be expected from the prophet, whose exalted state of feeling demands more eloquent language. Accordingly God is called "the one who is and who was and who is coming." This combination of words served to remind Christians that even in the hour of trial their hope rested in a deity who long ago declared himself to be the great I AM, who was still unchangeable in his omnipotence, and who was soon to come to the assistance of the faithful, granting them a complete deliverance from all their afflictions.

Associated with God, John pictures seven attendant spirits, variously identified in subsequent contexts as the seven flaming torches stationed before God's throne (4:5), and the seven gleaming eyes of the lamb which go forth over the earth to perform God's service (5:6). Again, probably these same powers are the seven angels that stand before God ready to do his bidding (8:2). This concrete manner of

describing heavenly agents was popular with the ancients, whose lively imagination readily pictured divine power now as a flame of fire, now as the gleaming eye of a wonderful lamb, or again as an angelic being made after the image of man. John distinguished seven of these majestic agencies of the Almighty ready to show grace and kindness toward the afflicted Christians.

A third source of heavenly favor is Jesus Christ, whose name calls forth from John a series of eloquent phrases. As a result of Jesus' self-sacrificing earthly career, ending in his death upon the cross, he has become the model "faithful witness," whose example is to be emulated by his persecuted followers. He also has a still greater distinction. The appearance to the disciples after his crucifixion had produced among Christians a general belief that he had been liberated from the lower world where the dead dwell and had ascended to heaven, thereby becoming the first-born of the dead. Moreover, the authority which he now possesses as the heavenly Messiah makes him virtually the ruler over all the kings of the earth, although the full display of his regal glory before the eyes of men is still to occur when in the near future he

suddenly appears coming upon the clouds of heaven.

Mention of the career of Jesus gives John occasion to exclaim that eternal glory and honor are due Christ for what he has already accomplished on behalf of Christians. In the first place he has made a wonderful demonstration of his love in providing cleansing from sins. The cleansing effect of blood shed by the victim offered in sacrifice strongly appealed to John's imagination as it did to the imagination of many of his Jewish, gentile, and Christian contemporaries. It was a normal procedure in those days when animal sacrifice was common, and when martyrdom seemed imminent for Christians, to view Jesus' death as an especial proof of his love and to represent him as a sacrificial lamb whose blood washed away the sins of believers, themselves ready to pour out their own blood if need be in loyalty to his name. Those were bloody times, when a blood-phrased theology was natural, if not indeed indispensable, to religious thinking.

Praise is due Christ for a further work. He has done more for Christians than merely to remove their sins. He has constituted them a new kingdom belonging to his God and Father.

Their present inferior position in the Roman Empire stands in sharp contrast to their true dignity and authority as members of the Kingdom of God. John applies to Christians the fulfilment of a promise originally made to the Hebrews after their deliverance from Egypt. If the latter had faithfully kept God's commandments, they would have become a holy nation wherein every individual would have been of true, priestly dignity.[1] John finds this promise finally fulfilled in the case of the Christians who, through their attachment to Christ, have become the holy nation of God's choice. In the midst of their present humiliation and suffering they may console themselves with the assurance of their royal dignity as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

How could John call Christ "ruler of the kings of the earth" and designate Christians as the "kingdom" of God in view of the conditions actually existing at that time? Jesus himself had been crucified by the Romans, and severe pressure was now being brought to bear upon his disciples to compel their submission to pagan customs. In comparison with the powers working against them, their ability to

[1] Exod. 19:6.

assert their rightful dignity must have seemed hopelessly inadequate to the situation. But John had a solution for this difficulty. In fact his controlling purpose throughout the book is to convince his fellow-Christians that the day of their deliverance is at hand, when the powers of the pagan world will be destroyed to make way for Christ's rule upon earth. When this is accomplished his disciples will be elevated to their rightful place in the new order of things. Under the inspiration of this confidence Old Testament phraseology springs to John's lips as he boldly exclaims, "Look! He comes upon the clouds." His advent is so near that John can almost see it as he writes. Christ will appear so literally and realistically that he will be manifest to everybody's gaze. Christians will greet him with great joy, while sorrow will lay hold of his adversaries. Well may they mourn, since his appearing seals their doom.

So certain is John of victory that he closes his message of greeting by citing God himself in support of this hope (vs. 8). Using as symbols of completeness the first and the last letter of the Greek alphabet, God declares himself to be the beginning and the end of all things. He has launched the world upon its

career and the last chapter in its history will also be of his making. Christ's triumphal return will be but the beginning of God's final demonstration of authority. Similarly Paul had viewed the return of Christ as only a temporary stage in history, leading up to a time when all things would be finally placed under the direct control of God.[1] John proposes a similar program. Christ is coming to establish his rule upon earth for one thousand years, but this will be only a preliminary stage of God's victory. The millennial rule of Christ is finally to be displaced by the establishment of the new Jerusalem, where God erects his tabernacle among men and dwells with them eternally.[2]

With these words of greeting John assures his readers that their hope of deliverance rests upon a firm basis. All the powers of heaven, including even God himself, have decreed the speedy end of the evil world and the glorious triumph of the Christian cause. Only one further preliminary matter remains to be considered. Is John adequately qualified to convey to his fellow-sufferers this message of hope? In order to reassure them on this point he

[1] I Cor. 15:28. [2] Rev., chaps. 20 f.

narrates the special experiences by which heaven has equipped him for his task.

III. JOHN'S PROPHETIC EQUIPMENT (1:9–20)

1:9 *I, John, your brother and joint partner in the affliction, kingdom, and patient endurance involved in following Jesus, was in the island called Patmos in order to receive the word of God and*
10 *the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's day I was in the Spirit and I heard a loud, trumpet-like*
11 *voice behind me saying: What you see record in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.*
12 *Then I turned round to see whose voice it was that was speaking with me, and thereupon I saw*
13 *seven gold lampstands and amid the lampstands a being resembling a man wearing a garment reaching to the feet and girded about the breast*
14 *with a belt of gold. His head with its white hair resembled snow-white wool and his eyes flashed*
15 *like a flame of fire. His feet glowed like molten bronze when at white heat in a furnace and his voice sounded like the roaring of mighty breakers.*
16 *In his right hand he held seven stars, a sharp double-edged sword projected from his mouth, and*

his face was like the sun when it shines in full strength.

17 *And when I saw him I fell at his feet as if dead, but laying his right hand upon me he said: Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last,*
18 *and the Living One. True I died, but see I am now alive for all eternity, and I hold the keys originally possessed by Death and Hades.*
19 *Therefore record your visions, which pertain both to present conditions and to subsequent events*
20 *that are soon to occur. The mysterious significance of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand and of the seven gold lampstands is as follows: The seven stars represent angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands represent the seven churches.*

Much discussion has revolved about the question of the author's identity. He refers to himself only four times and then simply as a Christian by the name of John who, apart from his experiences as an apocalyptic seer, claims no distinction other than that of sharing the afflictions suffered by his persecuted brethren. Although the name was a familiar one, this particular John would undoubtedly be well known to the readers through his past association with one or more of the Christian groups

to whom he wrote. In later times a desire for more complete information about him led to various conjectures regarding his identity. In the second century, when pressure of circumstances induced Christians to seek apostolic authority for early Christian writings, the author of Revelation was easily assumed to have been John the Apostle. The first explicit statement to this effect is found in Justin's *Dialogue* (81. 4), a book written soon after the middle of the second century. Early in the third century, when the apostle John had come to be regarded by universal consent as author of a gospel and three epistles, certain discerning Christian readers began to note striking dissimilarities in thinking and style between those documents and the Book of Revelation. In some quarters these observations led to doubt regarding the apostolic origin of Revelation. Dionysius, in the third century, knew Christians who alleged that the book had been fraudulently ascribed to the apostle. Dionysius, however, was more reserved in his skepticism. He expressed the opinion that the author's real name was John, not, however, the apostle but some otherwise unknown Christian of Asia.[1]

[1] Eusebius *Hist.* VII. xxv. 16.

Modern investigation is in general agreement with the conclusion of Dionysius, nor can it materially supplement his verdict. Today one may cite certain historical data pointing to the martyrdom of the apostle John while still in Palestine along with his brother James before 70 A.D.[1] In this event he manifestly cannot have written Revelation or the Fourth Gospel or the so-called Johannine Epistles. It has sometimes been surmised that the author of Revelation was a certain Asian presbyter John, who is mentioned occasionally in early Christian tradition. But there is no substantial evidence that this individual composed the Book of Revelation. All that may be said with any degree of assurance is that its author was a Christian of Asia bearing the familiar name of John. His remarkable lack of skill in the use of the Greek language, together with the predominantly Jewish element in his thinking, makes it reasonably certain that he was a Jew who had been converted to Christianity. Also as a Christian he belonged to the group known as prophets, who enjoyed the charismatic endowment of the Spirit which was believed to

[1] For particulars see James Moffatt, *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, pp. 602 ff.

guarantee the validity of his utterance and render unnecessary any other credentials to substantiate his message. On this ground alone he declared his Revelation to be "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."

John demanded to be heard simply on the ground of his prophetic equipment as an apocalyptic seer. The experience which inspired this particular expression of his prophetic powers had come to him on Patmos, a small desolate island lying off the coast of Asia Minor about sixty miles southwest of Ephesus. Apparently the immediate occasion of his visit to Patmos was either banishment or flight necessitated by his loyalty to the Christian faith. Hence he could remark that he shared the tribulations of his brethren as well as their confident and patient expectation of Christ's return to inaugurate the new messianic kingdom upon earth. One Sunday, while under the emotional agitation induced by intense strain, John suddenly experienced one of those elevated states of feeling characteristic of the ecstatic life of the apocalyptic seer. While thus "in the Spirit" he received a summons to write a book for the admonition and encouragement of his suffering brethren. After this experience it seemed to

him that the real occasion of his presence in Patmos had been no mere exigency of the persecution but a divine intention that through this means he might receive from God and from Christ instructions for his companions in misery (1:2). Following the example of his apocalyptic predecessors[1] John is to put in writing the heavenly wisdom disclosed to him in the vision.

When writing John seems to regard his residence in Patmos as a thing of the past. Therefore it is sometimes assumed that the book was composed, or at least completed, at some other place. Perhaps the place of composition was Ephesus or its vicinity, since this is the first Christian community to which the prophecy was to be read. Thence it was to be sent northward along the coast, first to Smyrna and then to Pergamum. At this point the messenger turned inland, following the main highways of travel and visiting in turn Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Just why these seven churches are chosen to the exclusion of those in other cities lying either in the direct route of the messenger or in contiguous territory is not perfectly clear. The church at

[1] Dan. 8:26; 12:4; I En. 82:1; 104:11; Asmp. M. 1:16; 10:11; 11:1; IV Ezra 12:37; 14:26, 45-47.

Colossae is ignored, and in all probability the neighboring cities of Hierapolis, Tralles, and Magnesia already contained recognized groups of Christians who would hardly escape the menace of the imperial cult, and to whom the reading of John's book would not have been inappropriate. One cannot refrain from suspecting that the author's fondness for sacred numbers, among which seven was an especial favorite, induced him to select just seven cities as the seat of those Christian congregations to which his prophecy should be delivered.

The figure appearing to John in his vision is the glorified Christ. The details of the picture are described in the familiar terminology of Old Testament and Jewish apocalyptic writings. The seven gold lampstands remind one of Zechariah's vision of the gold candlestick bearing seven lamps.[1] John's imagery was certainly influenced by the seven-branched gold candlestick of Jewish ritual.[2] Yet he employed seven independent lampstands as a more fitting figure to represent the seven different churches. The description of Christ as a "being resembling a man" is a familiar trait of Jewish apocalyptic imagery derived from the phrase "one

[1] Zech. 4:2. [2] Exod. 25:31 ff.; 37:17 ff.

like unto a son of man," in Dan. 7:13. The long robe extending to the feet and the gold girdle about the breast are features of royal and high priestly attire indicative of the dignity belonging to the heavenly Christ. In apocalyptic imagery white hair was usually a characteristic of God himself,[1] but John ascribes it even to Christ. The flashing eyes, the bronze feet, and the terrible voice are descriptive features freely reproduced from the imagery of Daniel in 10:5 f. Doubtless John had long been so familiar with this sort of apocalyptic scenery that the language came to him spontaneously. As he later explains (vs. 20), the seven stars in Christ's right hand are the guardian angels of the seven churches, a form of imagery easily entertained in an age when belief in guardian spirits was popular. The picture of the sword projecting from the mouth of the Messiah is a realistic reproduction of similar Jewish language usually referring figuratively to the spoken word of God.[2] But for John the sword in Christ's mouth is a real weapon with which he will one day slay his

[1] Dan. 7:9; I En. 46:1; 71:10.

[2] E.g., Isa. 11:4; 49:2; Wisd. Sol. 18:15 f.; Ps. Sol. 17:27, 39; I En. 62:2; IV Ezra 13:10.

enemies (19:15, 21). A shining countenance was also a current figure of expression for divine favor or dignity possessed by saints, angels, or God.[1]

John was so saturated with the imagery of Jewish apocalyptic that his description of the heavenly Christ inevitably phrased itself in this familiar language. At the same time it is possible that current gentile notions may also have exerted some subsidiary influence upon John's thinking. The seven lampstands amid which Christ walked might easily be associated with the seven planetary deities of pagan belief. In fact the Jewish historian Josephus, a contemporary of John, explicitly asserts that the seven-branched candlestick of Jewish tradition supported seven lamps "in imitation of the number of the planets."[2] The seven stars in Christ's right hand also suggest the astral idea of a specific constellation of heavenly powers. It may well be that John thus phrased his description of the heavenly Christ in order to make him transcend in splendor both the messianic portraiture of Jewish apocalyptic and the gentile pictures of astral powers.

[1] Judg. 5:31; I En. 14:21; 51:4; 71:1; 89:22, 30.

[2] *Ant.* III. vi. 7 (146); vii. 7 (182); *War* V. v. 5 (217).

Following the conventional procedure of the apocalyptic seer, John prostrated himself before the heavenly apparition and received the characteristic admonition to dismiss his fear. But quite new is the assurance that Christ himself is an almighty being who guarantees the safety of the saints. Essentially the same language previously used of God (vs. 8) is here applied to Jesus. He too is eternal, notwithstanding the fact that he once lived as a mortal upon earth. Indeed, his triumphant experiences with death and the lower world have put him in permanent possession of the keys of those regions, a fact which insures a similar victory for his followers, however numerous may be the victims of the persecutor. In this connection, as again in Rev. 6:8, Death and Hades are personified demonic powers in control of the lower world. In this reference to the successful combat of Jesus with the gods of the underworld, John followed a type of thinking already highly prized and widely prevalent, especially in gentile circles.

As the victor over Death and Hades, the heavenly Christ commissions John to write an apocalypse. The purpose of these revelatory visions is twofold, namely, to interpret present

conditions and to predict future events. John's first duty, therefore, is to write words of admonition and comfort to the seven churches, in order that their members may be warned to prepare for the impending catastrophic events with which the greater part of John's revelation is concerned. But even in the prosaic task of giving practical admonitions to the churches, an appropriate air of apocalyptic mystery is maintained by employing the imagery of the seven stars and the seven lampstands. In fact, John is commanded to address his message, not directly to the churches, but to the several angels[1] represented by the stars in Christ's right hand.

What is meant by this language? While one may not hope to unravel completely an apocalyptic mystery, the notion of sending a communication to the angels of the respective churches would be easily comprehensible for John and his readers. At that time belief in guardian spirits was widely popular among Jews, Christians, and pagans. These heavenly protectors were thought to have a care not only for individuals but also for nations. In Daniel,[2] Michael, as the angelic champion of the people of Israel, engages in conflict with

[1] Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14. [2] Dan. 10:13, 20 f.; 12:1.

similar angelic representatives of Persia and Greece. Various gentile guilds also often claimed the protection of patron divinities. It was quite natural for John to assume that the several groups of Christian believers to whom he wrote enjoyed the ministrations of their respective guardian spirits who were in a way conceived to be a heavenly double of the earthly institution. And it was peculiarly appropriate that a Christian prophet, who elsewhere clearly intimates his own equality with the angels (19:10; 22:8 f.), should address his message to this heavenly guardian who of course would be present in the assembly to hear the reading of John's book. Perhaps John also assumed that by addressing the angel he would more effectively enlist the latter's services in impressing the people with the seriousness of the message. On the other hand it is possible that John used this form of expression merely to give an added tone of solemnity to his admonitions.

IV. MESSAGE TO EPHESUS (2:1–7)

2:1 *To the guardian angel of the church at Ephesus write:*

He who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks amid the seven gold lampstands speaks

2 *thus: I am aware of your activities—your strenu-*
ous labor and your patient endurance. I know
that you are unable to tolerate wicked men and
that you tested those who call themselves apostles,
when they are not, and found them to be impostors.
3 *You display patient endurance and have borne*
up under afflictions incurred by your loyalty to
my name, nor has your zeal for my cause abated.
4 *But I hold it against you that you have*
abandoned your former practice of showing love
5 *for the brethren. Therefore call to mind the high*
station from which you have fallen, repent, and
resume your former activities. Otherwise I am
coming to you to remove your lampstand from its
6 *place, unless you repent. But you have to your*
credit the fact that you hate the activities of the
Nicolaitans, whose doings I also hate.
7 *Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit*
says to the churches: To the one who conquers
I will grant the privilege of eating food from the
tree of life which is in the paradise of God.

The message to the Christian community at Ephesus is presented in genuinely apocalyptic form as a direct communication from Christ. Though formally addressed to the guardian angel of the church, it is designed primarily for the instruction of the members. In the first

place the Ephesians are commended for their fidelity to Christianity in times of persecution and for their prompt rejection of false apostles. In the early days of spontaneous Christian leadership such charlatans sometimes preyed upon innocent Christian communities. The earliest missionaries who went from place to place preaching the gospel received the name of apostles. At first this group included the Twelve, and certain other outstanding leaders, like James the brother of Jesus, Paul, and Barnabas. As a reward for their self-sacrificing service these evangelists were usually granted free entertainment when visiting the churches.[1] In the course of time death gradually removed the original apostolic leaders and a new generation of traveling preachers arose to claim the title and prerogatives of their predecessors. As the number of those aspiring to apostolic privileges increased, it sometimes happened that selfish and indolent individuals pretended to be traveling missionaries when in reality they were merely taking advantage of the generosity of indulgent Christian communities. In consequence of this abuse the churches were compelled to discriminate between those persons

[1] I Cor. 9:3–14.

who were genuine missionaries of the apostolic type and those who were mere impostors. We do not know how the Ephesians proceeded to expose the character of the false apostles who sought to prey upon their generosity. The *Didache*,[1] a Christian document of the early second century, prescribes that every apostle be received as the Lord, but if his visit is prolonged beyond a single day, or at most two days, he is to be regarded as an impostor.

John censures the Ephesians for only one defect. The early Christians placed great emphasis upon acts of brotherly love as expressed in hospitality and care for the needy members of the community. But as the group of believers increased in numbers and the more conventional type of life was adopted, the spontaneity of its earlier charitable activities tended to disappear. Apparently this had been the experience of the Ephesian church, and John regards it as a serious defect needing immediate correction. Let the Ephesians return to the primitive simplicity and charitable practices of earlier days if they wish to escape the condemnation of Christ at his coming. Incidentally John approves of their treatment of

[1] *Did.* 11:4 f.

the Nicolaitans, whose perversity is more specifically described in the letter to the church at Pergamum (2:14).

In a manner befitting apocalyptic style, the message to the Ephesians closes with an oracular utterance repeated at the end of each letter. It addresses itself particularly to those who have the capacity for receiving instructions from the Spirit. At the outset Christ had been speaking, but this final admonition is uttered by the Spirit. For the apostolic seer revelations from Christ and revelations from the Spirit are essentially identical. The blessings of paradise are held out as a reward of continued fidelity during the strenuous happenings of the last times. This representation belongs to the customary imagery of Jewish apocalyptic, which pictures the new messianic age as a return in heightened splendor and privilege of the blessings of the first paradise.

V. MESSAGE TO SMYRNA (2:8–11)

2:8 *Also to the guardian angel of the church at Smyrna write:*

The First and the Last, he who died and came to life again, speaks thus: I am aware of your tribulation and worldly poverty, but in reality you

9 *are rich. I am aware of the calumny heaped upon*
you by those who call themselves Jews, when they
are not, but in reality are a synagogue of Satan.
10 *Do not be afraid of the sufferings that are about*
to overtake you. True, the devil is about to throw
certain of your number into prison in order that
you may be tested and suffer a ten-day tribula-
tion. Prove faithful even if it leads to death, and
I will reward you with the crown of eternal life.
11 *Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit*
says to the churches: He who conquers will suffer
no harm from the second death.

The initial phrase, "the First and the Last," identifies Christ as the speaker (1:17). The Christians of Smyrna receive no word of criticism but only encouragement to fidelity and promises of reward. They have already endured persecution which apparently has resulted in the loss of worldly goods through confiscation or otherwise, for which they are promised heavenly riches. Their troubles seem to have arisen especially from the hostile action of their Jewish neighbors. It is not difficult to understand Jewish animosity toward the Christian movement. The preachers of the new religion not only attempted, and with some success, to draw converts from the Jewish community, but

they also taught that Christians alone interpreted the Old Testament correctly and were the only true perpetuators of genuine Hebrew religion. Moreover, Christians won over to their cause certain Gentiles who had previously entertained a comparatively high estimate of Judaism, and who had been regular attendants on the services of the synagogue. Under these circumstances bitter enmity between Jews and Christians in gentile lands was inevitable.

In the case of the Smyrnean church, Jewish hostility seems to have expressed itself in the form of slanderous accusations made to the gentile authorities. Just as the enemies of Jesus are represented in the Gospels as persuading Pilate that Jesus was a menace to the good order of the Empire, so the Jews of the Dispersion probably tried to make it appear that Christians were dangerous to the safety of the state. Various alleged evidences against them could be cited. In announcing the imminent return of Christ they were tacitly proclaiming the early downfall of the Roman government. Their practice of coming together in a secret meeting to observe the Lord's Supper was a further occasion of suspicion. And as worship of the ruler became increasingly popular

in Asia, Jews might easily suggest to the authorities that Christians were not entitled to the privilege of exemption from interference now universally accorded to the Jewish residents of the Empire.[1]

In some such way the Jews of Smyrna had been instrumental in causing trouble to the Christian community, and on this ground John brands them a synagogue of Satan. For John, thoroughly imbued as he was with a rich religious heritage from Judaism, the true Jewish faith was perpetuated in the Christian movement, and those Jews who refused belief in Christ were therefore apostates from the true faith. They no longer served Jehovah, but had allowed themselves to become the agents of Satan. According to apocalyptic philosophy Satan was the ultimate source of evil, but he

[1] Josephus (*War* VII. x. 1) reports that when the Jews of Alexandria handed over to the Romans their Jewish kinsmen, the Sicarii, who had fled thither after the revolt in Palestine, the latter were called upon to confess Caesar's lordship, even though this confession was not required of the Jewish residents of Alexandria in general (see above, pp. 20 f.) Apparently the withdrawal of the Jewish community's protection from the Sicarii was the signal for the Romans to demand acknowledgment of Caesar's lordship. It is quite possible that Jewish hostility toward Christians may have operated in a similar manner to bring about a demand on the part of the Romans that Christians worship Caesar.

frequently employed human agents in the execution of his designs. Hence John believes that the devil by the aid of local assistants in Smyrna will presently bring still severer affliction upon the church of that place. Some of its members will probably be cast into prison, and some may even be put to death, but in the latter event they will insure for themselves the brilliant crown of the victor in the life to come. The statement that the period of testing will endure ten days is hardly to be taken literally. The phrase is scriptural, being derived from Dan. 1:14, where a ten-day tribulation is the apocalyptist's way of saying a brief tribulation.

In the exalted refrain which closes the message the Spirit is again introduced as speaker, assuring the Smyrneans that triumphant Christians will escape all the terrors of the second death. This terrible event is to overtake sinners on the day of judgment as described by John in a later portion of his book (20:6, 14 f.; 21:8).

VI. MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM (2:12–17)

2:12 *Also to the guardian angel of the church at Pergamum write:*

He who is equipped with the sharp, double-
13 *edged sword says: I know where you reside. It*

is in the city where Satan has his throne. Yet you hold fast my name and you did not renounce your belief in me even in the days when Antipas, my true witness, was put to death among you, in the city where Satan resides.

14 *Nevertheless I hold it somewhat against you that you have there certain persons adhering to precepts like those of Balaam who taught Balak to set a trap for the children of Israel by enticing them to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to practice*
15 *fornication. So you also have in your midst some who similarly adhere to the precepts of the*
16 *Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. Otherwise I am coming to you speedily to make war upon them with the sword of my mouth.*

17 *Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit says to the churches: To the one who conquers I will grant the privilege of eating the hidden manna and will give him a white pebble upon which is inscribed a new name known to no one except the recipient.*

The seer recognizes that the Christians of Pergamum are living in the midst of peculiarly trying and dangerous surroundings. The city was so pre-eminent a center of heathen religions that it could very fittingly be termed the place of Satan's own residence where his very throne

was to be seen. What John means by Satan's throne is not perfectly clear. Pergamum contained a magnificent altar of Savior Zeus, and also a thriving cult of Asklepios, with his sacred serpent.[1] Either of these phenomena might readily suggest to John the special activities of Satan. But mention of the sufferings endured by Christians for the name of Christ makes it highly probable that the Caesar-cult of Pergamum was regarded by the seer as the unique exhibition of Satan's presence upon earth. It was in this city in the year 29 B.C. that the first temple of the official imperial cult of the province had been reared to Augustus and the goddess Roma. Henceforth the city continued to be a vigorous and influential center of emperor-worship. It was entirely natural that Christians of Pergamum should receive especially severe treatment for their refusal to worship Caesar, and, in fact, of the seven churches addressed this seems to have been the only one where an actual martyrdom had as yet occurred.

In spite of the admirable fidelity exhibited by the Pergamenian Christians in the hour of persecution, they are blamed for tolerating in their midst a few individuals who are too liber-

[1] See above, pp. 10 f.

ally disposed toward their pagan environment to suit the puritan temper of the apocalyptic seer. He takes offense at the readiness with which these persons eat meat from animals that have been killed in the heathen sacrifices. When a sacrifice was offered certain portions of the victim were used to provide food for a public feast or were appropriated for the needs of the priests, but a considerable part of the meat was usually placed on sale in the public market. In a sense the temples were the slaughterhouses of antiquity, and one who had scruples against using this meat might often find it difficult to procure any other. Thus the question of eating meat constituted a real problem for Christians living in a gentile environment. Even in Paul's day the Corinthians had debated this same issue, with the result that some Christians took a conservative attitude while others adopted a very liberal course of procedure.[1]

In the church at Pergamum there were a few Christians who, following the leadership of a certain Nicolas, were liberally disposed on the question of meats. They may have made it a practice to purchase openly such meat in the market, or on occasion they may have attended

[1] I Cor., chap. 8.

a public feast where portions of the sacrificial victim were served. It is also possible that as members of a trade guild, or through some other form of customary social contact with Gentiles, they were accustomed to partake of this forbidden food. From the standpoint of John's strenuous puritanism such concessions to pagan custom would easily be interpreted to involve gross immoralities. By Jews and early Christians alike the religious rites and social customs of paganism were commonly supposed to involve practices of fornication. The eating of meat sacrificed to idols and the immoralities of fornication were stock accusations to bring against the heathen. Following this precedent similar charges were freely leveled against any members of the Christian community who might show an inclination to come to terms with the social or cultural life of their gentile environment. It was commonly assumed in purely a priori fashion that any deviation from traditional beliefs or customs must necessarily be prompted by evil motives. Mere nonconformity was itself prima facie evidence of guilt, and the dissenter was often branded with the label of liberalism, which was supposed to carry its own moral condemnation.

Perhaps the censured Christians of Pergamum were victims of conventional habits of condemnation. Since they were exponents of the liberal practice in reference to the use of sacrificial meats, their opponents readily suspected them of participating in the characteristic immoralities of paganism. John even goes to the extent of implying that they sought to accomplish the ruin of true religion. Their conduct is likened to that of Balaam, who served in Jewish tradition as a conspicuous example of this type of perversity. The Balaam of Old Testament story[1] had played a very different rôle, but John uses a later elaboration of the narrative which is to be found also in Philo[2] and in Josephus.[3] According to this tradition Balaam is said to have advised Balak, king of Moab, that he could bring disaster upon Israel by instigating the Midianite women to entice the young men of the Hebrews to participate in heathen religious rites. So John implies that the Nicolaitans' advocacy of freedom in the use of sacrificial meat is really intended to entice Christians into the immoral ways of paganism. It is quite possible that the accused persons

[1] Num., chaps. 22 ff.

[2] *Life of Moses* I. 53 f. [3] *Ant.* IV. vi. 6 f.

would have resented the implication as unjust, but the seer is convinced that their conduct admits of no other interpretation. Therefore they are admonished to abandon their practices, else Christ will come suddenly upon them to slay them with the sword that projects from his mouth.

In contrast with the sacrificial meat which some Christians of Pergamum had been eating, a new divine food is promised those triumphant Christians who keep themselves holy and ready to receive Christ at his coming. In referring to hidden manna, John again draws upon late Jewish tradition which reported that the ark with its sacred contents, including the pot of manna, had been hidden by Jeremiah before the Babylonians captured Jerusalem, but would be restored to the faithful by the Messiah. A belief that the righteous would again be given manna for food in the messianic kingdom is clearly expressed in the Apocalypse of Baruch:

> And it shall come to pass at that self same time that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high and they shall eat of it in those years because these are they who have come to the consummation of time [29:8].

The significance of the white pebble secretly inscribed with a new name would be readily

understood by all John's readers, familiar as they must have been with the widely prevalent magical practices of that day. These practices rested upon belief in the magical significance of a name. To know the name of an individual, whether of a spirit or of a man, was thought to give one power over that person, and to carry about in one's possession an amulet inscribed with a name known to no one else was regarded as the best possible guaranty of special privilege and immunity from harm. What John probably means is that the saints in the new messianic kingdom will be equipped with a charm in the form of a white pebble on which a new secret name for each person will be written. However strange this notion may seem to the thinking of modern times, it could not fail to make a strong appeal to the original readers of Revelation.

VII. MESSAGE TO THYATIRA (2:18–29)

2:18 *Also to the guardian angel of the church at Thyatira write:*

The Son of God, who has eyes that flash like a flame of fire and whose feet glow like molten
19 *bronze, speaks thus: I am aware of your activities —your brotherly love, fidelity to Christ, ministry*

to the needy, and patient endurance. And I know that recently your activities have been greater than they were at the outset.

20 *But I hold it against you that you tolerate the woman Jezabel, who calls herself a prophetess and by her teaching entices my servants to practice*
21 *fornication and eat meat sacrificed to idols. I gave her an opportunity to repent, but she is not*
22 *willing to repent of her fornication. Mark you, I am about to cast her upon a bed of sickness and sorely afflict those who share her fornication, unless*
23 *they forsake her practices. Her children also I will smite with death. Thus all the churches will know that I am the one who discerns the secret purposes of the heart and I will requite each of*
24 *you in accordance with your conduct. But my message to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching and have not, as they say, known the "deep things" of Satan, is, that I put*
25 *upon you no additional burden except that you continue steadfast in your present course of action until the time of my coming.*

26 *If anyone conquers by persisting to the end in activities pleasing to me I will give him, as I also have received from my father, authority over the*
27 *Gentiles and he will rule them with a rod of iron, smiting them down even as vessels of pottery are*

28 *shattered in pieces. Also I will give him the*
29 *brightness of the morning star. Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

Except for a single defect the Christians at Thyatira were heartily approved. Unfortunately, however, they like their brethren of Pergamum harbored in their midst certain persons who advocated a too liberal attitude toward heathen society. The leader of this movement was a woman who played the rôle of prophetess, thus lending prestige to her teachings. In that age, especially among Gentiles, a unique respect was accorded the prophetess as well as the prophet. The title might be applied to any woman of ecstatic temperament, particularly if her utterances were sometimes delivered in an oracular manner. But instead of admitting the woman of Thyatira to the dignity of a prophetess, John calls her a "Jezabel." Probably this was not her real name, but was intended as a term of disgrace used symbolically to depict her iniquity, as is similarly the case when Rome is called "Babylon" (14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21). Such symbolic usage is characteristic of apocalyptic style. She was a Jezabel because she led astray Christians even as Jezabel (Jezebel) of old

seduced King Ahab, causing him to serve heathen gods and resist Elijah, the true prophet of Jehovah.[1]

This Christian Jezabel was guilty of advocating the exercise of that same freedom in one's relation to pagan society that John had previously condemned as Nicolaitanism (2:6, 14 f.). But in Thyatira the propaganda seems to have been more successful than in other communities, probably in consequence of the zeal of the prophetess. On a previous occasion she had been reprimanded, probably by John himself, but apparently she had only been the more vigorous in the pursuit of her activities. Not only had she won a following in Thyatira, but her fame had spread among the Christians of other communities, who were, however, to be taught a lesson by the divine punishment presently to overtake her. In those days it was a common belief that sickness and premature death were chastisements from God. This opinion is strikingly illustrated by Paul when he informs the Corinthians that their unworthy conduct in observing the Lord's Supper has caused the ill health from which many of them are suffering and the death of

[1] I Kings 16:31 ff.; 18:4, 13; 21:23 ff.; II Kings 9:22, 30–37.

others.[1] Should John's prediction come true, in like manner the prophetess of Thyatira would be laid low by illness, her children would be carried off by death, and those persons who continued to share her views would be similarly punished.

The exact nature of her guilt is not made absolutely clear by John. Undoubtedly she maintained the propriety of eating meat that came from sacrificial victims, and she may have approved of attendance upon heathen feasts or other social gatherings of pagan society. This procedure might involve fornication, yet it did not necessarily do so. Of course for John so free a concession to pagan customs implied abandonment of the true faith and lapse into idolatry, a type of conduct which Jews were accustomed to describe figuratively as fornication.[2] This alone had been the peculiar sin of the original Jezabel.[3] So John accuses the Christian Jezabel of enticing the servants of God in Thyatira to apostatize to heathenism by eating idolatrous meats. Whether he also intended to charge her with the actual practice of sexual immorality is less certain. It is

[1] I Cor. 11:30.

[2] II Chron. 21:11, 13. [3] I Kings 16:31–33.

hazardous to press a literal meaning upon the figurative language of apocalyptic writers, yet it is also true that John would undoubtedly be predisposed to regard her vicious teaching as prima facie evidence of moral degeneracy. Today we have no means of knowing to what extent his suspicions may have been true to fact. Knowledge of the "deep things" which she and her followers claimed for themselves sounds like an oracular utterance of a prophetess reiterating claims to knowledge similar to those made by the liberals of Corinth in justification of their practice of eating sacrificial meats.[1] Whatever may have been the nature of this knowledge as claimed by its advocates, for John it was simply a Satanic wisdom.

The closing sentences of the message to Thyatira offer the faithful, not a program of concession to gentile customs, but an assurance that Christians will share with Christ the privilege of ultimately annihilating all their heathen foes. Then will the triumphant saints find themselves bathed in the glorious light which radiates from the victorious Messiah whom John later calls the bright morning star (22:16).

[1] I Cor., chap. 8.

VIII. MESSAGE TO SARDIS (3:1–6)

3:1 *Also to the guardian angel of the church at Sardis write:*

He who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars speaks thus: I am aware of your activities and that although reputed to be alive you
2 *are at the point of death. Wake up and reinforce the remnant of your waning vitality which is on the point of vanishing, for in the presence of my God I have found no works of yours complete.*
3 *Therefore call to mind the instruction you have received and heard, and laying it to heart repent. If, however, you do not watch I shall come upon you stealthily like a thief, nor will you know at*
4 *what hour I shall come upon you. But you have a few persons in Sardis who have not polluted their garments, and they will be permitted to walk with me in white raiment because they are worthy of this reward.*
5 *Likewise he who conquers will be clothed in white garments and I will not erase his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge him as mine*
6 *in the presence of my father and his angels. Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

In referring again to Christ as the source of his revelation, the seer describes him as holding

in his hand not only the seven stars representing the seven churches (1:16, 20), but also the seven spirits who are regularly stationed before the throne of God (1:4). This impressive figure commissions John to utter a message of sweeping denunciation upon the Christian group at Sardis. Details are lacking, but apparently in John's opinion this church has turned aside into forbidden paths and has almost completely failed to pursue the proper course of conduct upon which it originally started. From the predominant interest of the seer disclosed in his remarks to other churches, one readily infers that the trouble with the group in Sardis has been a too intimate association with gentile society and a too general abandonment of the puritanic aloofness which had characterized its activities during the earlier years of its career. John laments that only a remnant of its former manner of life has survived, and even this is fast disappearing. Therefore he warns the church that in the heavenly books kept in the presence of God, to which Christ as a matter of course has access, the record of the Christians' activities in Sardis is sorely deficient. Only by a hasty and thorough repentance can drastic punishment be averted.

There are only a few individuals in Sardis who still cling to the old ways, and these are promised a typical messianic blessing. When the new kingdom is established they will be clothed in gloriously resplendent garments and will be admitted into the company of the triumphant Christ clad in his own regal attire. In the day of judgment their names will be found safely preserved in the heavenly book in which all the saints are listed, while the names of their unfaithful companions will apparently have been removed from this favored position. The safety of the saints is further insured by a promise that on the judgment day they will be conducted by Christ himself into the very presence of God and his angels, and there Christ will declare them to be his own peculiar possession.

Apocalyptic seers often refer to the book of life along with other records kept by God. The idea of heavenly books containing an account of all men's doings, or a special list of those persons entitled to heavenly rewards, is an ancient form of religious imagery well known to the Hebrews, particularly after their contact with the Babylonians. Its prominence in Christian and Jewish apocalypses is a continuation of

the usage in Daniel, where mention is made of the books to be opened in the day of judgment, and of a book in which the names of the righteous are accurately recorded (7:10; 12:1). John often refers to such records (13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27), but says nothing about the manner in which they were kept. In Jewish thinking it was sometimes assumed that God himself had made the entries, but more frequently he is represented as choosing for this purpose a special recorder, such as Enoch, Ezra, Michael, or some less conspicuous heavenly scribe.

IX. MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA (3:7–13)

3:7 *Also to the guardian angel of the church at Philadelphia write:*

The holy and reliable one, he who holds in his possession the key to the coming kingdom of David, who opens and none shall shut and who shuts and
8 *none shall open, speaks thus: I am aware of your activities. Behold I have placed before you a door of hope standing open which no one is able to shut. I know that your resources are small, that you kept my command, and that you did not*
9 *renounce my name. Behold I will make the members of the synagogue of Satan, who call themselves Jews when they are not, but are liars—*

behold I will make them come and prostrate themselves at your feet, and they shall know that I
10 *loved you. Since you kept inviolate my command to exercise patient endurance, I will also preserve you during the time of testing which is about to come upon the whole world to test the inhabitants*
11 *of the earth. My coming is at hand. Hold fast your present course in order that no one may deprive you of your crown.*
12 *If anyone conquers I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, nor shall he ever depart therefrom, and I will inscribe upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God—the new Jerusalem which descends out of heaven from my*
13 *God—and my own new name. Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

For the Christians in Philadelphia, as earlier for their brethren in Smyrna (2:8–11), the seer has no word of censure, but only a message of encouragement. Apparently their conduct thus far has been all that could be desired, notwithstanding the disadvantages of their situation. The reference to their lack of resources seems to imply a worldly poverty[1] similar to that of the

[1] In the common Greek of this period the word δύναμις is frequently used for "means" in the sense of financial resources, as in II Cor. 8:3. See Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament, s.v.*

Smyrneans. While in each case the low economic status of the church meant lack of prestige in the community, it did not foster a disposition to cater to the demands of heathen society, a tendency against which John so often protests. Still another point of resemblance between the Smyrneans and the Philadelphians is the action of the Jews in stirring up hostility toward Christians. Probably the Christian group in each of these cities was so inconspicuous, both economically and socially, that its existence might have escaped the notice of the authorities had not the Jews intervened.

The church at Philadelphia is given very remarkable assurances of reward for its fidelity. Christ, whom the seer always represents as the source of each message, is here declared to hold absolute authority over the gate of admission to the new messianic kingdom originally promised to David. Thus Christ can admit whom he will and exclude whom he will. In accordance with standard apocalyptic thinking, this kingdom exists in heaven ready to be let down upon earth at the end of the age, and even now its gate stands open for the admission of the Philadelphian Christians. Not only are their oppo-

nents unable to close this entrance, but in the last day God will force those Jews who have rejected Christ to prostrate themselves at the Christians' feet. But before receiving the crown of victory believers must pass through that final period of testing which, according to apocalyptic writers, is immediately to precede the coming of the Messiah. Probably John has reference here to the anticipated period of special testing for Christians when the beast impersonating the imperial power will make its supreme attempt to impose worship of itself upon all the peoples of the Empire (Rev. 13:6–18). This event will be the sign that Christ's coming is very near; hence the necessity for fidelity under persecution.

The closing promise to the conqueror is an interesting display of messianic imagery. The new Jerusalem, which John is later to describe at length (21:9—22:5), will be let down from God's presence in heaven. While this new city will contain no specific temple structure, the entire city will be a sanctuary because God and Christ dwell therein (21:22), and the saints also will have a place there as permanent as the pillars of the temple. Availing himself once

more of the current belief in the magical power of names (2:17), John assures his readers that they will have at their disposal the secret might of God, the new Jerusalem, and Christ. What these names are to be, of course, no one knows, for to disclose them would mean a loss of the Christians' special privilege.

X. MESSAGE TO LAODICEA (3:14–22)

3:14 *Also to the guardian angel of the church at Laodicea write:*

The Amen, the faithful and reliable witness who stands at the head of God's creation, speaks
15 *thus: I am aware of your activities and know that you are neither positively evil nor zealously righteous. I wish you would go to one or the*
16 *other of these extremes, but since you are tepid and neither hot nor cold, I am about to vomit you*
17 *out of my mouth. Because you say I am rich and have acquired wealth and am in need of nothing, and do not realize the wretched creature that you really are, pitiable and poor and blind*
18 *and naked, therefore I advise you to purchase from me gold tested by the fire in order that you may be truly rich, and white garments to put on in order to avoid revealing the shame of your*

nakedness, and eye salve to apply to your eyes in order that you may see.

19 *Those whom I love I reprove and chastise;*
20 *therefore become zealous and repent. Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone will heed my voice and will open the door I will become his guest and will eat with him and he with me.*
21 *The one who conquers I will permit to sit beside me on my throne, even as I have conquered*
22 *and sat beside my father on his throne. Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

The titles used of Christ in the address to the Laodiceans emphasize the certainty and authority of the message. He who authorizes the seer's warning is the very personification of verity, fidelity, and reliability. Moreover his presidency over the creation of God carries an authority which the Laodicean church would seem to be bound to respect. In referring to this official dignity of Christ, perhaps John has in mind not only the present world but more especially the new messianic kingdom over which Christ now presides in the heavenly sphere while awaiting the hour for his descent to earth, when a full display of his messianic authority will be exhibited. Thus Christ is the

official who inaugurates the new age, the true divine creation.[1]

Matters had been going altogether too smoothly with the Christians of Laodicea to suit the strenuous otherworldly temper of the apocalyptic seer. The Laodiceans were not holding themselves in momentary expectation of the end of the present world, but on the contrary were engaging in trade or business which had brought them a good measure of prosperity. This economic success undoubtedly insured a degree of social prestige that made possible a sense of comfort and security which seemed to John utterly worthless in view of his confidence in the early destruction of all worldly possessions. He advises the Laodicean Christians to forego these earthly comforts in order

[1] It is true that ἡ ἀρχή of Rev. 3:14 is usually given a more speculative turn, as meaning either that Christ was the first work of God's creation or, more commonly, that he was the active source and principle underlying creation (Col. 1:15ff.). But apocalyptic seers usually are interested primarily in questions of authority and have no taste, or even no capacity, for philosophical definitions. In general this is also true of John, and since ἀρχή may mean a position of primacy, a magistracy (Titus 3:1), this is more probably the sense in which John uses the term. This probability is enhanced by the practice, current at this time in Asia, of applying ἄρχω and ἀρχή to emperors whose birthday or accession to power the inscriptions flatteringly hail as the beginning of a new age for mankind.

to secure for themselves the richer heavenly treasure that would be dispensed among the saints in the messianic kingdom. It is noteworthy that in the Laodicean church John finds no occasion to upbraid outstanding acts of sin such as he charges against the Nicolaitans and the Jezabelites. The lack of exaggerated evil in the church seems to the seer a positive disadvantage, for otherwise there might be more hope of reform. But the Laodicean Christians were too respectable to feel the sting of reprimand and too inferior to merit praise. Their religion was a tepid affair, nauseating to an extremist of John's type, for whom moderation was a well-nigh unpardonable fault because so difficult to dislodge from its intrenched self-complacency.

However, a ray of hope is still extended to the Laodicean Christians. The seer's harsh message is delivered for their reproval and chastisement, with a view to encouraging a hasty and sincere repentance before Christ returns. John thinks this event is so near that even now Christ may be said to be standing at the door, a metaphor used by other early Christians to express their belief in the imminent Parousia.[1]

[1] Mark 13:29; Matt. 24:33; Jas. 5:9.

The notion of a fellowship meal to be shared in common by Christ and the saints in the new kingdom was also a current item of belief in both Jewish and Christian apocalyptic circles.[1] A similarly familiar notion closely associated with this festive scenery is the picture of a throne or thrones representing special seats of honor and power, occupied not only by God and Christ but also by the righteous. To be enthroned was the proper status of one empowered to enact judgment, which according to the eschatological beliefs of Christians was a prerogative to be shared alike by God, Christ, and the triumphant saints.[2] Such were the promised rewards that John held up to the gaze of the Laodicean church as an incentive for effecting a hasty and genuine repentance.

[1] I En. 62:14; Matt. 26:29; Luke 22:16, 18, 29 f.

[2] I En. 108:12; I Cor. 6:3; Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:29 f.

CHAPTER V

BEGINNINGS OF TRIBULATION (REV. 4:1—11:14)

In the course of his initial vision John had been commissioned (1) to record a revelation regarding the present status of the churches, and (2) to describe impending events (1:19). The former of these obligations was met by composing the letters to the seven churches. On the authority of Christ the seer praised the members of the churches for their fidelity in the past, admonished them to remain steadfast in the future, rebuked them for their shortcomings, and strenuously exhorted them to institute such reforms as were needed in preparation for the early advent of the Messiah.

With this task accomplished, John was ready for the second part of his work. He anticipated an early aggravation of the Christians' troubles, when Roman persecution would become increasingly severe and the exaggerated evils of the last times would begin to break forth upon the earth. But he had been consoled and reassured by his own firm conviction

that an early and complete triumph was in store for Christians. In his opinion the multiplication of ills merely signified the near approach of the end, when Satan's rule would be completely abolished and Christ's kingdom fully established. A description of incidents leading up to this grand consummation forms the subject-matter of the remaining portion of Revelation. It depicts numerous forms of evil that are to become increasingly prevalent in the last times (4:1—11:14), it describes the great outburst of wickedness to issue in the ultimate overthrow of Rome, the unique agent of Satan (11:15—18:24), and it portrays the final victory of heaven and the glories of the new age when Christ will come in triumph, causing the saints to dwell in eternal peace (19:1—22:5). As a matter of fact the letters to the churches are only introductory, being primarily designed to prepare Christians to participate in those phenomenal impending events which the seer is about to foretell.

John's preliminary visions of coming events are mainly a message of assurance to his companions in distress. While confronted by threatening afflictions, they are first shown a picture of the transcendent majesty and power

of the God in whom they trust (chap. 4). To this is added a similar description of the exalted Christ and his glorious status in heaven (chap. 5). A relatively brief reference to the beginnings of distress in the last times (6:1–8) serves as a setting for reminding Christians that God will hear the cry of the martyrs and bring their enemies to justice by executing his judgment upon all the unsaved (6:9–17). In describing the sealing of the righteous (7:1–8) and the final happy condition of the redeemed (7:9–17) the seer provides further evidence that the ultimate victory of the Christians' cause is fully assured, notwithstanding the temporary ascendancy of its Satanic foes and the seeming tardiness of God in interfering to relieve the situation.

Then follows a series of pictures portraying even more vividly the increase of evils. All who dwell upon earth must suffer, but the righteous will confidently await the intervention of heaven to destroy the forces of Satan and vindicate the saints. This time of testing will be a period of aggravated suffering, bringing to a climax the evils of the great tribulation so frequently represented in apocalyptic writings as the necessary preliminary to the final

deliverance which God and the Messiah will effect when the appointed time for divine action arrives. In John's visions the acceleration of distress begins with the introduction of seven trumpeting angels (8:1–6), who successively give the signal for displaying a series of pictures showing the characteristic afflictions belonging to the preliminary days of the time of tribulation. The first four signals introduce pictures exhibiting a series of convulsions in nature, which result in a reduction of nature's energy by one-third of its original force (8:7–13). The blowing of the fifth trumpet reveals a more terrible calamity, in the form of a swarm of demonic locusts from the underworld let loose upon earth to torture mankind for five months (9:1–12). The trumpet-blast of the sixth angel brings upon the stage a host of terrible warriors from the east, who slay one-third of the earth's inhabitants (9:13–21).

As the agonies of the tribulation are augmented almost beyond the point of further endurance, John sees a mighty angel solemnly affirming that the time has now arrived when the intervention of heaven will be delayed no longer (10:1–7). Also by swallowing a heavenly book the prophetic powers of the

seer are reinforced for his further task of depicting the final conflict between the forces of Satan and the forces of God (10:8–11). This is to be the theme of the next main division of his revelation, but as the last item in the preliminary period of the tribulation John has still to describe the fate awaiting the old Jerusalem (11:1–14).

I. HEAVENLY GLORY OF GOD (CHAP. 4)

4:1 *Afterwards I had a second vision when suddenly I saw a door standing open in the sky and the trumpet-like voice which I had heard speaking with me on the former occasion said, Come up here and I will show you a vision of subsequent events that must occur.*

2 *Immediately I was in the Spirit and, behold,*
3 *I saw a throne standing in heaven, and enthroned thereon was a being whose appearance was radiant as jewels of jasper and sardius, and encircling the throne was an emerald-colored*
4 *halo. Arranged in a circle about the throne were twenty-four thrones and seated thereon were twenty-four dignitaries clothed in white garments*
5 *and crowned with gold crowns. And there issued from the throne flashing lightnings, terrifying sounds, and pealing thunders. In front of the*

throne burned seven blazing torches, which are
6 *the seven spirits of God, and stretching away before*
the throne was a crystal-like expanse resembling
a sea of glass. In the midst of the throne, guard-
ing it on all sides were four living creatures all
7 *covered with eyes. The first living creature*
resembled a lion, the second resembled an ox, the
third had a face like that of a man, and the fourth
8 *resembled an eagle in the attitude of flight. And*
the four living creatures, each having six wings, were
covered with eyes all over, even inside their wings.
By day and by night they incessantly exclaimed:
Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty,
the one who was and who is and who is coming.
9 *And as often as the living creatures render*
glory and honor and thanksgiving to him who
occupies the throne and who lives throughout
10 *eternity, the twenty-four dignitaries fall down*
before him who occupies the throne and worship
him who lives throughout eternity; and casting
down their crowns before the throne they exclaimed:
11 *Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive*
glory and honor and power, because thou didst
create all things and by the action of thy will
they existed and were created.

Following the ecstatic experience in which he had witnessed a vision of the heavenly

Christ (1:9–20), the seer seems to have resumed temporarily his normal state of mind. But presently his ecstatic powers are revived. This time he beholds an open door in the sky, and, as in 1:19, he again hears the voice of Christ, now calling him up to heaven. Either standing before this opening in the sky, or passing in at the entrance, John acquires from the heavenly regions the wisdom which he reveals in his book. This interpretation of his ecstatic experience accorded perfectly with the standard apocalyptic views of his age. People of that day believed the earth to be flat and the sky to be a bell-shaped vault of solid material shutting off the heavenly regions from the view of men.[1] This steely vault was supposed to be penetrated by numerous openings or doors through which angels, Christ, and even God himself might descend to earth at will, or through which especially favored men might occasionally be admitted into the presence of the deity. Entertaining this view of the world's structure, apocalyptic seers often believed that they had been permitted, when in a state of trance, to enter heaven and there to receive disclosures of future events.[2]

[1] See above, p. 133.

[2] See above, pp. 143 ff.

As usual, John credits his unique experience to possession by the Spirit. In this favored state he obtained a view of that room in heaven where God himself sat enthroned. The glory of this Divine Being and the majesty of his court are described at some length, evidently for the purpose of inspiring Christians with confidence in the ultimate triumph of their cause. With this supreme God of heaven on their side, victory is sure. To find imagery and language appropriate to the description of such a vision was comparatively easy for John. Both his Jewish and his gentile predecessors had painted similar scenes from the world of God and the angels. These pictures not only stimulated John to the attainment of his visions but helped him in his subsequent efforts to depict the content of his own ecstatic experiences.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, John was influenced most immediately by Ezekiel's descriptions of what he had seen when the heavens opened to him disclosing visions of God.[1] But John's language combines a wide range of current imagery, gentile as well as Jewish in its origin. The idea that the deity

[1] Ezek. 1:1, 26 ff.

occupied a throne in heaven was a generally accepted belief of the time. Similarly familiar was the notion that brilliant light radiated from God's countenance and a halo surrounded his head. The readers of Revelation would find nothing strange or astonishing in this description of the deity's appearance. The twenty-four royal satellites enthroned about him are less common figures. Jewish imagery furnishes no similar item, but in both Babylonia and Persia twenty-four subordinate dignitaries are part of the royal court of heaven. The Babylonians recognized a group of twenty-four astral deities whom they termed assistant judges of all things, a fact known to Diodorus of Sicily[1] more than a century before John's day. From some such source, probably through the more immediate channels of popular fancy, this feature in the scenery of heaven had become a part of John's thinking. Also as Zeus was the hurler of thunderbolts for the Greeks and Jehovah was the god of thunderstorms among the Hebrews, so John can appropriate this idea to heighten the effect of his description of the Christian God. Again, it was as easy for the people of that day to picture spirits in the form

[1] ii. 31.

of torches stationed before the throne of God as to represent them in human form. Angels, spirits, and other supernatural beings were supposed to have the ability to assume any shape that convenience might dictate and to exist temporarily or continuously as a torch or star or any other appropriate entity. The crystal-like expanse forming the floor of the royal chamber seen by John is probably his way of referring to the great ocean of heaven upon which the throne of God was supposed to stand. It was popularly believed, especially in Jewish circles, that the bell-shaped vault called the firmament supported a heavenly ocean which had been lifted up and separated from the waters of earth on the second day of creation week.[1] The four strange creatures which adorn God's throne are a free combination of the cherubim of Ezek. 1:5 f. and the seraphim of Isa. 6:2 f. The refrain which they chant continuously is also a Christianized form of the seraphim's utterance.

The worship rendered God by the members of his court undoubtedly had peculiar significance for John and his contemporaries. This heavenly scene would suggest the Roman

[1] Gen. 1:6–8.

imperial court and the claims to reverence made by the arrogant Domitian, who demanded that he be addressed as "our Lord and God." In contrast with this blasphemous assumption of divinity, John reminds his readers that the God whom they revere and he alone is fully deserving of such honors even from the highest dignitaries of heaven. His status as creator of the world makes it fitting that he should be recognized as the undisputed possessor of all glory, honor, and power.

This entire picture of God enthroned in heavenly glory means for John a guaranty of victory for all Christians who will faithfully resist the aggressions of the imperial cult. However great the odds against them may seem to be when viewed with the eyes of ordinary mortals, the seer whose vision penetrates to the heavenly regions knows that the power of the Almighty God is on the side of the persecuted saints. Nor is this all. With a similarly practical end in view, in his next vision John describes the unique dignity and power of the heavenly Christ, who is presently to intervene on behalf of his afflicted disciples.

II. POWER AND GLORY OF CHRIST (CHAP. 5)

5:1 *Lying upon the open right hand of him who*
occupied the throne I saw a book-roll written on
2 *both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I*
saw a powerful angel proclaiming in a loud voice,
Who is worthy to open the roll and break its seals?
3 *And no creature either in heaven or on earth or*
in the underworld possessed ability either to open
4 *the roll or to look upon its contents. As I was*
weeping bitterly because no one was found worthy
5 *to open the roll or to look upon its contents, one*
of the dignitaries said to me, Stop weeping.
Behold the Lion who is of the tribe of Judah and
of David's line has conquered and can open the
roll and break its seven seals.

6 *Then I saw standing in the center of the throne*
surrounded by the four living creatures and the
twenty-four dignitaries, a Lamb bearing the marks
of the sacrifice, and having seven horns and seven
eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent on
7 *missions to all parts of the earth. The Lamb*
came and received the book-roll from the right
8 *hand of him who occupied the throne. And when*
it took the roll the four living creatures and the
twenty-four dignitaries fell down before the Lamb.
They each had a harp and gold bowls full of
incense, the incense being the prayers of the saints,

9 *and they sang a new song: Worthy art thou to*
receive the book and to open its seals, because thou
wast slain and didst purchase with thy blood a
possession for God from every tribe and tongue
10 *and people and nation, and thou didst constitute*
the redeemed a kingdom of priests for our God,
and they shall rule over the earth.
11 *Then in my vision I heard a shout of a host*
of angels encircling the throne, the living creatures,
and the dignitaries. They numbered myriads of
12 *myriads and thousands of thousands, as they*
loudly exclaimed: The Lamb that was sacrificed
is worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom
and might and honor and glory and blessing.
13 *Then I heard all created beings which are in*
heaven and on earth and in the underworld and
upon the sea, and all existences in these regions,
exclaiming: Blessing and honor and glory and
power to him who occupies the throne and to the
Lamb throughout eternity.
14 *Then the four living creatures said, Amen,*
while the dignitaries fell down and worshiped.

Again, as in 3:5, a heavenly book is brought upon the scene. In conformity with the usual type of ancient book it was composed of a long, ribbon-like sheet of papyrus, rolled about a stick fastened to each end of the sheet,

the roll being secured by tying or sealing. The particular book seen by John was secured in some mysterious way by seven different seals, a new section of its content being revealed as each successive seal was broken. Since no one in all the universe had been able to obtain the privilege and the power to break any of the seals, the secrets of the book had not yet been disclosed. Apparently John is aware that it is the book of doom containing a record of future events to happen in connection with the end of the world, and on finding its seals still intact he is overcome with grief at his inability to learn its content. But one of the twenty-four dignitaries of the royal court consoles him with the information that Christ has acquired authority to break the magic seals. His messianic dignity is suggested by a reference to his membership in the tribe of Judah and his Davidic lineage, while his triumph over death and victorious ascent to heaven have placed him in a position of authority second only to that of God. This conqueror will relieve the seer's anxiety by opening the roll and revealing its contents for the reassurance of the persecuted Christians. John is not to be disappointed in the promise that he should

receive a vision revealing impending events of cosmic importance (4:1).

As seen by John on this occasion, Christ assumes the form of a lamb occupying a central position within the elaborate structure upon which God sits enthroned. The ease with which Christ can be pictured now in human form (1:13), now as a lion (5:5), and now as a marvelous lamb (5:6) is of a piece with popular ways of religious thinking current among John's contemporaries, who could similarly depict Zeus as a man or a bull or any other creature that fancy might suggest. The scars showing that the lamb had once been offered in sacrifice served to identify it with Christ, who according to John's thinking had endured a sacrificial death upon the cross. The seven horns and the seven eyes are striking features whose chief function probably is ornamental. The climax is reached when the lamb receives the book from God's hand. Thereupon the entire royal court breaks forth in fulsome praise of the redemptive work already accomplished by Christ. By means of his sacrificial death he is said to have purchased for God a group of redeemed people selected from among the Jewish tribes, from Gentiles of different languages,

and from all nationalities. Such was the cosmopolitan character of the early Christian communities even as they existed in John's day. The members of these diversified Christian groups constitute for the seer a new kingdom of sacerdotal sanctity, who in spite of present affliction will one day rule supreme with Christ upon earth.

When the members of the royal court end their hymn of praise to Christ, innumerable hosts of angels take up the strain, declaring him worthy of every form of distinction. Finally the seer in his vision hears all creation, all heavenly existences, all beings upon the earth, and all inhabitants of the underworld acknowledging the undisputed supremacy of both God and Christ. Thereupon the scene closes with a confirmatory Amen from the four seraphim and an act of worshipful obeisance by the twenty-four dignitaries of the royal court.

These marvelous pictures of God and Christ painted by John as the opening scenes in his revelation of coming events are designed to inspire courage and confidence in the minds of his readers. With these scenes of divine power and glory before their eyes, the seer would have them share his confidence in the

ultimate overthrow of the hostile Roman emperor who now claims for himself those titles of reverence which Christians refuse to ascribe to any authority except that of heaven. Since God and Christ are the supreme powers in the whole universe, Christians are sure of Rome's ultimate overthrow and of their own glorious triumph, however severely they may have to suffer in the meantime.

John is now ready to witness the breaking of the seven seals. With the loosing of each he is to behold, spread out before him as in a great picture-book, a panorama of coming events.

III. BEGINNINGS OF DISTRESS (6:1–8)

6:1 *When the Lamb broke the first of the seven seals I heard in my vision the first of the four living creatures exclaiming in thunderous tones,*
2 *Come. Then I saw a white horse bearing a rider equipped with a bow and adorned with a crown. He rode forth a conqueror and for the purpose of conquering.*
3 *And when the Lamb broke the second seal I heard the second living creature exclaiming,*
Come. Then again I saw a red horse come forth
4 *bearing a rider who was given power to take away peace from the earth in order that men may*

slaughter one another, and he was furnished with a great sword.

5 *And when the Lamb broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature exclaiming, Come. Then I saw a black horse bearing a rider with a*
6 *pair of scales in his hand, and I heard a voice which seemed to come from the midst of the four living creatures, exclaiming, A quart of wheat for a denarius and three quarts of barley for a denarius, but the oil and the wine thou shalt not injure.*

7 *And when the Lamb broke the fourth seal I heard the voice of the fourth living creature*
8 *exclaiming, Come. Then I saw a horse of ashen hue bearing a rider whose name is Death, and he was attended by Hades. They were given authority over the fourth part of the earth, to slay men with sword and with famine and with death and by means of the wild beasts of the earth.*

Each of the four horsemen seen by John in his vision symbolizes a form of preliminary affliction to overtake the Roman world as the time for Christ's return approaches. Apocalyptic writers habitually describe the agonies of the last days in terms of invasion, civil war, famine, pestilence, and other destructive phenomena.[1]

[1] See above, pp. 133 ff.

The language of Mark 13:7 f. is typical:

> And when ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, be not troubled. These things must needs come to pass but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; there shall be earthquakes in divers places; there shall be famines. These things are the beginning of travail.

The pictorial representation of heavenly horsemen was also an impressive form of symbolism current in both Jewish and gentile circles. Certain elements in John's vision apparently were suggested by the language of Zechariah,[1] but probably other features of the picture were derived from current descriptions of astral deities popularly represented among the Gentiles as horsemen riding in the skies.

The breaking of each seal is accompanied by a loud shout from one of the living creatures, summoning the apocalyptic horsemen to appear successively upon the scene. The white horse with its crowned rider accoutered for victory is prophetic of some foreign invader whose triumph over Rome will mark an initial stage in the course of disasters ultimately to culminate in the complete overthrow of the Empire by Christ. Probably John has in mind an

[1] Zech. 1:8; 6:1–8; see also II Macc. 3:25; Josephus *War* VI. v. 3 (298); Sib. Or. iii. 805 ff.

invasion by the Parthians or other hostile peoples from the east, who are expected to hurl themselves furiously against Rome. The red horse and the sword carried by its rider are still more vivid symbols of the strife and bloodshed to overtake the Empire. The black horse typifies a period of famine, when food would become so scarce that a quart of wheat, the standard daily ration for one person, would increase to twelve times its normal price. The cost of even the coarser barley meal would similarly advance to a denarius, which was the daily wage of the workingman, according to Matt. 20:2. In actual value the denarius was approximately twenty cents, but under normal conditions its purchasing power was as great as or greater than that of the modern dollar.[1] The command to leave the oil and wine unharmed seems to be a vague allusion to Domitian's controversy with the people of Asia over the edict to prohibit the cultivation of the vine in the province.[2] Oil and wine were the char-

[1] For a description of the economic situation in the Roman Empire, though a couple of centuries after John's day, see F. F. Abbott, *The Common People of Ancient Rome* (New York: Scribner, 1911), pp. 145–78; also W. S. Davis, *The Influence of Wealth in Imperial Rome* (New York: Macmillan, 1910).

[2] See above, p. 54.

acteristic luxuries of the rich. Therefore it may well have seemed to John that an appropriate feature of the final distress would be an aggravated indulgence of pleasure among the rich, while the more substantial staple articles of food were becoming almost unattainable for the masses. Such a view was in full agreement with the denunciation of worldly possessions so vigorously made in certain of John's letters to the churches. The fourth horse signifies death in general. It is pale like a corpse in color, and is ridden by Death, whom the ancients often regard as a person dwelling in the underworld. His attendant is Hades, another demonic power of the lower regions who drags off to his own abode the souls of those persons whom Death has slain. This realistic imagery was both familiar and acceptable to John and his readers.

IV. PROMISE OF JUDGMENT (6:9–17)

6:9 *When the Lamb broke the fifth seal I saw beneath the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for their loyalty to the word of God and their adherence to the testimony which they*
10 *possessed. And they cried out with a loud voice: O holy and genuine Lord, how long will it be before you bring the inhabitants of the earth to*

judgment and wreak vengeance on them for
11 *shedding our blood? Then a white robe was granted to each of the martyrs and they were told that they must patiently wait yet a little while longer until the number of their fellow servants and brethren who were presently to be slain, even as they had been, should also be completed.*

12 *And when the Lamb opened the sixth seal again I saw a vision. A great earthquake occurred, the sun became black as a mourner's robe, the whole face of the moon took on a blood-like color,*
13 *the stars of the sky fell upon the earth even as a fig tree drops its unripe fruit when shaken by a*
14 *wind, the vault of heaven was parted asunder and rolled up like a book-roll, and every mountain and*
15 *island was removed from its place. The kings of the earth, the members of the royal court, the military authorities, the rich, the athletes, and every slave and freeman concealed themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains.*
16 *And they cried to the mountains and the rocks: Fall on us and conceal us from the sight of him who occupies the throne, and from the wrath of the*
17 *Lamb, because the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to survive?*

Turning from his vision of Death and Hades (6:8), John sees another picture assuring him

that those Christians who have been slain for adhering to the word of God and to the instruction received from Christ have not been carried off to the lower world but have been given a favored position in heaven. The exact identity of these martyrs is not specified, but evidently John has in mind those Christians who have died in loyalty to the new religion. Antipas would be in the company (2:13), also the victims of the Neronian persecution, and any others who might have been slain for their faith. Beneath the heavenly altar their souls repose in safety. Probably John and his readers found a peculiar significance in this location. Just as the life-blood of the victim offered in earthly sacrifices flowed down to the base of the altar, so the souls of the slaughtered saints rested beneath the altar in heaven. Their cry for vengeance is addressed to the holy God who is truly Lord in contrast with the blasphemous Caesar who falsely lays claim to this title.[1] For the present they must be content with the gift of a white robe, but only a short time will elapse before God is to execute upon Rome the

[1] True, John here uses δεσπότης rather than the more common κύριος, but the former word occurs in Josephus (*Ant.* XVIII. i. 6; *War* VII. x. 1) referring to the lordship of Caesar, and probably this usage was common among Greek-speaking Jews.

judgment for which the martyrs plead. The predestined number of the martyred saints must be filled up before God will act, but John expects an early completion of the number as a result of impending persecutions under Domitian and his immediate successors. The period of waiting is to endure only "a little while longer." It was a characteristic feature of Jewish apocalyptic thinking to assume that God had foreordained a certain number of martyrdoms which must be accomplished before he would intervene to bring an end to the present evil age.[1]

Answering the martyrs' cry for vengeance, John's next vision reveals the calamities that await the wicked in the day of judgment. The picture exhibits those violent convulsions in nature which frequently recur in Jewish and early Christian descriptions of events to occur as the end of the present world draws near.[2] To this stereotyped apocalyptic imagery of his predecessors John adds a vivid description of the fate awaiting the pagan world and its inhabitants. Not only will the earth be shaken

[1] I En. 47:4; Bar. 23:5; IV Ezra 4:33–43.

[2] Isa. 2:10 f., 19, 21; Ezek. 32:7 f.; Joel 2:10 f., 30 f.; IV Ezra 6:14 ff.; Sib. Or. iii. 80 ff.; Mark 13:24 f.

to its foundations and the light of the sky be darkened, but the partition separating heaven from earth will be torn asunder and rolled up just as the ribbon-like papyrus constituting the ancient book was wound about the stick to which it was fastened. With the heavenly firmament thus removed, the enthroned God and the glorified Lamb could look directly down upon the human objects of their wrath. Then terrified mortals, unable to endure the sight, would hastily strive to secrete themselves among the débris of the shattered earth. All the various classes of heathen society, from kings to slaves, would vainly seek a way of escape from the wrath of divine judgment. This picture convinces John that the Christian martyrs' cry for vengeance will not be in vain.

V. SEALING OF THE FAITHFUL ISRAELITES (7:1–8)

7:1 *Afterwards I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth restraining the four winds of the earth in order that no wind should blow either upon the earth or upon the sea or upon any tree.*
2 *And I saw another angel ascending from the east with a signet of the living God, and he shouted with a loud voice to the four angels who had it in*

3 *their power to harm the earth and the sea: Do no*
injury to the earth or the sea or the trees until
we have set a seal upon the foreheads of God's
4 *servants. Also I heard the number of those who*
were sealed, their being in all one hundred and
forty-four thousand from the different tribes of
5 *the sons of Israel. There were twelve thousand*
from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand from the
tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand from the tribe
6 *of Gad, twelve thousand from the tribe of Asher,*
twelve thousand from the tribe of Naphtali, twelve
7 *thousand from the tribe of Manasseh, twelve thou-*
sand from the tribe of Symeon, twelve thousand
from the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand from
8 *the tribe of Issachar, twelve thousand from the*
tribe of Zebulun, twelve thousand from the
tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand from the tribe of
Benjamin.

While waiting for the opening of the seventh seal John is permitted to gaze upon two very reassuring pictures (7:1–8 and 7:9–17), which set the future safety of the righteous into sharp contrast with the fate of the wicked just disclosed by the breaking of the sixth seal (6:12–17). In the first of these new visions the scenery presents ideas especially characteristic of that age. The earth is assumed to be a plane

with four special angels stationed respectively at its northern, eastern, southern, and western extremities. The winds are regarded as harmful powers subservient to the will of these governing angels. John's picture indicates that in the period of tribulation the winds will contribute their share to the general devastation. But before they are let loose upon their mission a fifth angel will appear, coming through the bell-shaped vault of the sky at an opening in the east, where the sun makes its daily entrance. This special angelic messenger is to place the seal of God upon all those Israelites who are destined to survive the destruction of the world. These will be Jews who, like John, have accepted Christianity and therefore merit the peculiar favor of God. Ultimately this number will aggregate just one hundred and forty-four thousand, and they are to receive on their foreheads God's special stamp in order that their safety may be made doubly secure. As their forefathers in Egypt had been protected by the mark on the doorpost, so by a magical imprint of the divine signet upon their foreheads they will be rendered immune from the terrors of the last tribulation. In listing the twelve tribes John omits Dan, thus following as he so often

does a later form of Jewish tradition rather than the biblical narrative.

VI. STATUS OF THE REDEEMED (7:9–17)

7:9 *Afterwards I beheld a vision of an innumerable multitude of persons from all nations, tribes, peoples, and languages. Clad in white robes and carrying palm branches in their hands, they stood before the throne and before the Lamb, and they*
10 *exclaimed in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God who occupies the throne, and to the Lamb.*
11 *Then all the angels took their stand in a circle about the throne and about the dignitaries and about the four living creatures, and prostrating themselves before the throne they worshiped God,*
12 *exclaiming: Truly blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and strength belong to our God throughout eternity. Amen.*
13 *Then one of the dignitaries asked me: Who are these persons clad in the white robes, and*
14 *whence came they? I answered him: You know, my lord. And he said to me: These are they who come through the period of final distress, having washed their robes and made them white*
15 *in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are stationed before the throne of God rendering*

him worshipful service day and night in his temple, and he who occupies the throne will over-
16 *shadow them as a tent. Never again will they suffer either hunger or thirst, and neither the sun*
17 *nor any scorching heat will afflict them, for the Lamb stationed in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd leading them to springs of living water and God will dry their eyes of every tear.*

Following the vision which assured John that a select group of Jewish Christians would be saved, his gaze is directed toward a new scene where the blessed status of all the redeemed is depicted. In this company are Christians gathered from among all the different nationalities that were mingling in the syncretistic life of the Mediterranean World. Probably the sealed Israelites previously described are also included in this new company. It is an innumerable multitude which apparently embraces the entire membership of Christendom as saved from the final catastrophic destruction of the world and permanently inducted into the blessings of the new age. The redeemed give God and Christ the glory for having accomplished their salvation, while the angelic choir responds with a characteristic outburst of praise, as in 4:11 and 5:12 f.

The seer's attention is directed especially to the fact that this innumerable throng equipped with the insignia of a triumphal procession has passed safely through the period of final distress, the great tribulation, which is to overtake the world in the last times. In a subsequent portion of his book John is to describe more at length the agonies of the final tribulation and the glories of the new Jerusalem. But up to this point his visions have been mainly a message of reassurance in view of the trials through which Christians must pass before attaining to this condition of bliss. It was quite fitting that the final status of the redeemed should be exhibited here as a future certainty, thus strengthening Christians to face the prospect of approaching distresses to be revealed more particularly with the opening of the seventh seal. The seer has reminded his fellow-believers that God sits enthroned in the heaven holding all the forces of the universe under his control. There also Christ abides, endowed with an authority second only to that of God. Hence the pagan world is surely destined for destruction, when judgment will be executed upon sinners and the sufferings of the righteous will

be avenged. The ultimate safety of the saints is sure, however severe may be their afflictions in the meantime, and the final reward of all the redeemed is a blissful association with God and Christ in the new order of existence to supersede the present régime under which John and his persecuted brethren were living when he wrote.

VII. PREPARATION FOR NEW DISTRESSES (8:1–6)

8:1 *When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, silence*
2 *prevailed in heaven for about half an hour. Then*
I saw seven trumpets given to the seven angels
3 *that stand before God. Also another angel carry-*
ing a gold censer came and took his stand at the
altar. He was provided with much incense in
order that he might offer it at the altar of gold in
the presence of God on behalf of the prayers of all
4 *the saints. And the smoke of the incense from*
the hand of the angel went up before God on behalf
5 *of the prayers of the saints. Taking his censer*
the angel filled it with burning coals from the
altar and cast them upon the earth. Then
followed pealing thunders, terrifying sounds,
6 *flashing lightnings, and an earthquake. There-*
upon the seven angels with the seven trumpets
made ready to blow their trumpets.

In the immediately preceding scene the praises of the angelic host had loudly reverberated through the chambers of heaven (7:12). As the sound died away a half-hour of ominous silence reigned, a fitting prelude to the staging of new scenes in the description of still greater tribulations. God's dwelling-place in heaven is supposed to be equipped not only with a temple proper,[1] but also with an altar of burnt offering,[2] and an altar of incense[3] similar to those which had been employed upon earth in the Jewish ritual. At the heavenly altar an angel burns a large quantity of incense in order that God may be reminded of the prayers which the saints as well as the martyrs (6:10) are sending up to heaven, begging for vengeance upon their enemies. On a previous occasion these prayers had been vividly called incense itself (5:8). Symbolic of the disasters soon to overtake a decadent and wicked world, John sees the angel take fire from the altar and throw it upon the earth. Thereupon the silence of heaven is broken by the frightful display of a thunderstorm and the terrors of an earthquake. The angels with trumpets take their places ready

[1] Rev. 3:12; 7:15; 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5 ff.; 16:1, 17.
[2] Rev. 6:9; Exod. 38:1–7. [3] Rev. 8: 3; Exod. 37:25–29.

to give the signal for revealing to the seer a new succession of disasters to occur as the days of unrelieved tribulation move on to a climax.

VIII. CONVULSIONS IN NATURE (8:7–13)

8:7 *When the first angel blew his trumpet there followed a storm of hail and fire mixed with blood falling upon the earth. The flames consumed the third part of the earth and the third part of*
8 *the trees and all green grass. When the second angel blew his trumpet an object resembling a great mountain all aflame was cast into the sea and the*
9 *third part of the sea turned into blood, the third part of all the living creatures in the sea died, and*
10 *the third of all ships perished. When the third angel blew his trumpet a great star flaming like a torch descended from the sky, falling upon the third part of the rivers and upon the sources of*
11 *the waters. The star is called Wormwood. The third part of the waters turned to wormwood, and great numbers of men died from drinking the*
12 *waters because they had been poisoned. When the fourth angel blew his trumpet the third part of the sun and the third part of the moon and the third part of the stars were smitten so that the third part of them was darkened and the third part of the day as of the night was without light.*

13 *Then in my vision I heard an eagle flying in mid-air exclaim with a loud voice: Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth because of the remaining trumpet-blasts of the three angels who are about to blow their trumpets.*

In rapid succession the first four angels blow upon their trumpets and John is shown four scenes disclosing a series of convulsions in nature. This imagery is in accord with characteristic views of apocalyptic writers to the effect that not only mankind but the physical world itself will be overtaken by confusion and destruction as the end approaches. The first disaster is pictured in the form of a devastating hailstorm accompanied by livid flashes of blood-red lightning. The second picture represents an uprooted volcano while in active eruption cast into the sea. The third preliminary affliction is to result from the falling of a star that embitters and poisons the fresh waters of the earth, thus causing death to many persons. The luminaries of the sky are also to be affected by this initial process of disintegration. Not only is one-third of their brilliancy lost, but apparently also the time of their shining is reduced to two-thirds of its usual duration.

The descriptive features of these scenes embrace items that probably were derived from various sources. Certain elements of the imagery recall the plagues that had been inflicted upon the Egyptians. But other items in the description seem to have been suggested by dreaded meteorological and physical phenomena especially familiar to the people inhabiting those volcanic regions. Violent electric storms, shooting stars, or comets were objects of peculiar horror among the common people of the ancient world. Western Asia Minor in particular had been visited frequently by disastrous earthquakes and terrifying volcanic eruptions. Probably the falling star was suggested by the phenomenon of a meteor or comet, and this astral wormwood, in comparison with the natural variety, is not only bitter but also poisonous. Yet the ordinary wormwood sometimes seems to have been regarded as a poison among the Hebrews.[1]

The four disasters thus far described are relatively light afflictions, affecting particularly the earth, the waters, and the sky. The distresses that remain to be portrayed exhibit more vividly the intervention of terrible demonic

[1] Deut. 29:18; Jer. 9:15; 23:15.

agencies who direct their activities especially against the inhabitants of the earth. The eagle brought upon the scene at this point serves to call attention to this aggravation of evils that are to emerge as the period of tribulation proceeds to a more advanced stage.

IX. LOCUSTS FROM THE ABYSS (9:1–12)

9:1 *When the fifth angel blew his trumpet I saw*
a star which had fallen from the sky to the earth.
This astral being had the key of the passage to
2 *the abyss, and when he opened the passage to the*
abyss there came up from the passage dense smoke,
like smoke out of a huge furnace, which obscured
3 *the sun and filled the air with blackness. Out of*
the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth, but
they possessed powers like those of the common
4 *scorpion. They were told not to injure the grass*
of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but
only those persons who do not have the seal of
5 *God upon their foreheads. Yet they were not*
permitted to kill men outright, but only to afflict
them for five months. This affliction was like
6 *the bite of a scorpion when it stings a man.*
And in those days men will seek death but never
find it; they will desire to die, but death flees
from them.

7 *In appearance the locusts resembled horses*
equipped for battle. On their heads were orna-
ments resembling crowns of gold, their faces were
8 *like the faces of men, they had hair like a woman's,*
9 *and their teeth were like those of lions. They had*
scaly bodies resembling breastplates of iron, and
the noise made by their wings was like the sound
of chariots drawn by many horses hastening to
10 *battle. They had tails like those of scorpions,*
and stings in their tails which enabled them to
11 *afflict men for five months. They had over them*
as king the angel of the abyss whose name in
Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he is named
Apollyon.
12 *The first woe is completed, but behold there are*
two woes yet to follow.

The picture of the abyss emitting dense clouds of smoke infested with fearful demonic locusts easily fitted into the popular notions of John's day. Beneath the earth there was assumed to be an underworld at least part of which was called the abyss, a horrid, fiery region inhabited by Satanic powers, even as heaven was inhabited by God and his angels. The entrance to the abyss was supposed to be through a pit or shaft leading downward, like the crater of a volcano. At ordinary

times the mouth of this shaft was thought to be closed by a great lid tightly sealed or locked, thus preventing the more terrible demons from swarming forth upon the earth. Sometimes the entrance was said to be guarded by an angel similar to the one described by John. The fumes which emerged from the mouth of the shaft when opened by the angel vividly exaggerate the phenomena of poisonous vapors and volcanic eruptions so well known in those regions.

In contrast with the destruction of vegetation wrought by the ordinary locusts, those described by John will devote themselves exclusively to the torture of mankind. These demonic pests have stings like a scorpion, an animal notorious for its venomous bite. For five months of the great tribulation men will be afflicted by this inescapable scourge. Only those who have the seal of God stamped upon their foreheads will be immune. Previously John mentioned only Jewish Christians as thus marked (7:4 ff.), but in this later connection he probably assumes such protection for all Christians. Why the plague is to endure just five months is not indicated. Perhaps this time was chosen because it corresponded with

that portion of the year during which the common locust might appear sporadically, and the terribleness of the infernal species is heightened by stating that it will be active throughout the entire period.

The terror of the anticipated visitation is increased by John's vivid description of these creatures' appearance. No fabulous monster of antiquity ever presented a more forbidding aspect. Certain traits in the description are derived from the account of hostile horsemen and chariots in Joel 2:4 f. But as a whole the imagery is probably a composite from different sources of ancient mythological fancy. These strange locusts are thought by John really to be demonic creatures who, like the angels of heaven, have power to assume different shapes according to the necessities of their mission. On this particular occasion they also have a leader whose name seems to mean destruction. Abaddon is an equivalent for Sheol, the common Hebrew name of the underworld, but the more exact Greek rendering of Abaddon would be *Apoleia* ("destruction"). Perhaps the form used by John, Apollyon ("destroyer"), was intended to serve better as a gibe at the Greek god Apollo.

X. A SCOURGE FROM THE EAST (9:13–21)

9:13 *When the sixth angel blew his trumpet I*
heard a certain voice, which emanated from the
14 *horns of the gold altar in the presence of God, say*
to the sixth angel who had the trumpet: Release
the four angels who are held in bonds at the great
15 *river Euphrates. Then the four angels who stood*
prepared for this hour and day and month and
year were released in order that they should kill
16 *the third part of mankind. The number of the*
cavalrymen was two hundred million. I heard
17 *their number. The horses with their riders which*
I saw in my vision looked thus: They had breast-
plates that flashed with fiery red, deep blue, and
bright yellow colors. The heads of the horses
resembled lions' heads, while from their mouths
streamed fire and smoke and sulphurous fumes.
18 *By means of these three plagues of fire and smoke*
and sulphurous fumes that streamed from their
mouths, the third part of mankind perished.
19 *For the destructive power of the horses is in their*
mouths, and also in their tails, for their serpent-
like tails have heads with which they do harm.
20 *But the remainder of mankind who survived*
these plagues did not turn away from the creations
of their own hands by ceasing to worship the
demons and the images of gold, silver, bronze,

stone, and wood, which are unable either to see
21 *or to hear or to walk; nor did they turn away from their murders, their magical practices, their fornication, or their thefts.*

In the visions of an apocalyptic seer it is as easy for the horns of an altar to utter a voice as for animals or trees to speak in fairy tales. In this way John learns about four angels that had been chained on the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire, and there held in readiness to enter upon their destructive mission at the appointed moment for their part in the great tribulation to be performed. These four demonic leaders are to assemble a vast host of cavalry that will swoop down upon the Empire and destroy one-third of its population. The fabulous creatures described in this picture combine the fantastic notions of current popular beliefs and traditional characteristics. In some respects they are modeled after the pattern of the infernal locusts recently described by John. The picture has also received coloring from the dread in which the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean held the wild and half-mythical Parthians, or other fierce peoples of the East, who were a constant menace to the Empire.

Notwithstanding the dreadfulness of this scourge, John does not look for any repentance on the part of the heathen who survive. They will not forsake their customary idolatrous ways. The accusations which he brings against them are practically identical with those of his Jewish predecessors who affirmed that the gentile gods were demons and that it was utter folly to worship dead images created by human hands. Jews also commonly alleged that the religion of the heathen was a mass of gross immoralities.

XI. A PROMISE OF THE END (10:1–7)

10:1 *Again I saw a powerful angel descend from heaven. He was clothed in a cloud, the rainbow formed a halo about his head, his face was radiant*
2 *as the sun, his legs were like pillars of fire, and he held a little book-roll open in his hand. Stand-*
ing with his right foot upon the sea and his left
3 *upon the earth, he uttered a loud shout like the roar of a lion. And when he shouted the seven*
4 *thunders raised their voices. As I was about to record what the seven thunders said, I heard a voice from heaven saying, Conceal what the seven*
5 *thunders said and do not record it. Then the angel which I saw standing upon the sea and*

upon the earth, raising his right hand toward
6 *heaven swore by him who lives throughout eternity,*
who created the heaven and the earth and the sea
and the things contained in them, that the period
7 *of waiting will continue no longer, but at the time*
when the seventh angel sounds the trumpet which
he is about to blow, then will be fulfilled the
mysterious period of God's waiting, as he has
announced its fulfillment to his servants the
prophets.

The strain of gazing upon the increasing distresses of the great tribulation is temporarily relieved by a new scene parenthetically interjected at this point to assure John that God's seeming indifference to the sufferings of the righteous is nearing a close. When the time arrives for the seventh angel to blow his trumpet, then a new series of visions will emerge showing John the beginnings of divine intervention to lead up to the final outcome of the conflict between God and Satan. The mysterious period of waiting for God to act is taken over into John's thinking from the prophetic utterances of his apocalyptic predecessors. He seems to have especially in mind the language of Dan., chap. 12. The question under consideration in this closing

chapter of Daniel is when the wicked will be halted in their reckless persecution of the saints. While perplexed by uncertainty Daniel sees an angelic being hold both hands up to heaven and swear "by him that liveth forever that it shall be for a time, times, and a half, and when they have made an end of breaking in pieces the power of the holy people all these things shall be finished" (Dan. 12:7). John believes that he is about to be shown the fulfilment of this mysterious language of prophecy, and that the sounding of the seventh trumpet will disclose the beginning of the end when celestial powers will assume an active part in the final battle to issue in the complete overthrow of Satan and all his agents.

XII. REINFORCEMENT OF JOHN'S PROPHETIC POWERS (10:8–11)

10:8 *The voice which I heard from heaven speaking*
with me again said: Go, take the book-roll lying
open in the hand of the angel who stands upon
9 *the sea and the earth. Then I went to the angel*
and said to him, Give me the little book-roll. He
replied, Take it and devour it; it will be bitter
in your stomach but sweet like honey in your
10 *mouth. Taking the little book-roll from the hand*

of the angel I devoured it, and it was sweet like honey in my mouth, but when I ate it my stomach
11 *was made bitter. Then someone said to me, Once more you must prophesy concerning peoples and nations and tongues and many kings.*

Another reassuring feature of John's digression at this point is the added note of certainty furnished by the introduction of the little book. This new augmentation of the seer's prophetic powers seems especially designed to insure the accuracy of predictions yet to be revealed. Undoubtedly Ezekiel (2:8—3:3) was the most immediate source of the notion that the eating of a divine book filled a seer with inerrant prophetic wisdom. The roll devoured by Ezekiel is said to have contained a record of lamentations, mourning, and woe. Like Ezekiel, John found it agreeable to be the recipient of a special revelation, for in the case of each of them the book was sweet to the taste. But the bitterness of its contents is a feature added by John, or rather is his way of indicating that this book contains predictions of sore distress corresponding to the lamentations, mourning, and woe written in the roll eaten by Ezekiel. In this special manner John's prophetic powers are reinforced before he

undertakes a description of the third woe, which is to depict the terrors of the final conflict between Satan and the powers of heaven. But the last scene in the second woe, the fate of the earthly Jerusalem, has yet to be recorded before the third woe is introduced.

XIII. FATE OF THE EARTHLY JERUSALEM (11:1–14)

11:1 *I was given a measuring reed resembling a staff*
and someone said to me, Arise and measure the
temple of God and the altar and the place in which
2 *the worshipers assemble; but exclude the outer*
court of the temple area, and do not measure it, for
it has been surrendered to the Gentiles and for
forty-two months they will trample upon the holy
city.
3 *I will also permit my two witnesses clad in*
garments of mourning, to prophesy twelve hundred
4 *and sixty days. These are the two olive trees and*
the two lampstands which stand before the lord of
5 *the earth, and if anyone wishes to injure them,*
fire streaming out of their mouths will consume
their enemies. If anyone wishes to injure them
6 *he must surely be killed in this way. These two*
witnesses have power to close the openings in the
sky, so that no rain will descend during the days

of their prophecy. They also have power to turn
the waters into blood and to smite the earth with
7 *every sort of plague as often as they wish. Then*
when they have finished their testimony the beast
that comes up from the abyss will fight with them,
8 *overcome them, and slay them. And their dead*
bodies will lie in the principal street of the great
city, which in figurative language is called Sodom
and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.
9 *For three and a half days men of every race and*
tribe and tongue and nation gaze on their dead
10 *bodies and refuse them burial. And the inhabit-*
ants of the earth rejoice over them and celebrate
by sending gifts to one another, because these two
prophets have tormented the inhabitants of the
earth.
11 *After three and a half days a reviving spirit*
from God having entered into them, they stood
upon their feet, while great fear seized those who
12 *saw them. And a loud voice from heaven was*
heard calling to them, Come up here. Then as
their enemies looked on, they ascended to heaven in
13 *a cloud. At that very moment a great earthquake*
occurred causing destruction to the tenth part of
the city and seven thousand persons perished in
the earthquake, but those who survived were filled
with fear and gave glory to the God of heaven.

14 *The second woe is completed; behold the third woe will soon begin.*

The Temple and its surroundings, which John in his vision is instructed to measure, are evidently the structures which stood upon the temple hill in Jerusalem. This section of the city embraced a large rectangular space surrounded by a high wall. Near the center of this area stood the Temple proper, and before it on the east was situated the great altar of burnt offering. These were surrounded by various chambers and also by certain areas or courts where different classes of Jewish worshipers assembled. Beyond these especially consecrated precincts was a large outer court to which Gentiles as well as Jews had free access. Such is the arrangement presupposed in John's description.

Does the command to measure the Temple symbolize its preservation or its restoration? John apparently has in mind the Temple at Jerusalem, yet this building had been destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., some twenty-five years before Revelation was written. In the meantime it had lain in ruins, and therefore the building that the seer was commissioned to measure did not exist. This situation has led

some interpreters to infer that at this point the Christian writer appropriated a fragment from an older Jewish apocalypse which had been composed before the fall of the Temple.[1] In that case the Jewish author imagined that the inner court and the Temple proper would be miraculously protected from harm while the outer court and the city of Jerusalem as a whole would be overrun by gentile invaders. Thus the measuring of the sanctuary might be taken as a prophecy of its preservation.

But this notion was scarcely appropriate to John's own situation, when the Temple was already in ruins. Even if he appropriated a current tradition originally intended to emphasize the inviolability of the Temple, his circumstances required that the tradition be assigned a different interpretation in accordance with the facts of subsequent history. For John the incident could appropriately signify only the idea of restoration. The mere fact of the Temple's destruction did not render absurd the command that he take its measurements. A seer in his vision could measure the imaginary model of a thing as easily as the thing itself. Thus

[1] The assumption that Revelation itself was written before the fall of Jerusalem is untenable. See above, pp. 42 ff.

Ezekiel was carried in his ecstasy to the desolate land of Judea and there beheld with his prophetic eye a heavenly apparition take careful measurement of buildings which had not yet been actually constructed.[1] Similarly for the Christian seer the visionary replica of the demolished Temple at Jerusalem was as easily mensurable as its actual earthly counterpart would have been. Even though the latter had been destroyed for a quarter of a century, there is no inconsistency in the command given to John; and the measuring of the Temple, the altar, and the inner court would signify for him a promise of restoration. The outer court to which Gentiles had formerly been admitted was to be left out of account, because they would no longer be tolerated in the new age when the new temple would be reared.

Probably John expected this rebuilding of God's sanctuary to occur after Christ had triumphed over the heathen, and presumably when he had established his earthly millennial kingdom upon the site of the holy city. If the writer attempted to be consistent in his thinking upon this subject, the new temple would have to belong in the millennial régime[2]

[1] Ezek., chap. 40. [2] Rev. 20:4–6.

rather than in the final state of bliss to be instituted after the close of the millennium. It is explicitly said that there is no place for such a sanctuary in the new Jerusalem, because God and the Lamb will be its temple.[1] But one may easily go too far in demanding logical consistency of an apocalyptic seer.

John's gaze is fixed intently upon the future rather than upon any specific events of past history. He is here concerned with the last scene in the second woe, the final outburst of heathen violence before God initiates his program of active intervention. With unprecedented arrogance for three and a half years the Gentiles will hold sway over the holy city. During this period God's concern for his people is manifested merely by the preaching of two special representatives, who at last are slain by Satan when he emerges from the abyss in the form of a beast. Thus the triumph of the heathen seems absolutely complete.

Both the temporary supremacy of the Gentiles and the preaching of a prophetic reformer were characteristic phases of Jewish belief regarding events to occur during the closing period of the great tribulation. The mission

[1] Rev. 21:22; but see 3:12; 7:15.

of a reformer is foretold in Mal. 4:5 f.: "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Jehovah come. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." As this item of apocalyptic belief was worked over in subsequent Jewish and Christian tradition it took on different forms. Sometimes either Enoch or Moses supplanted or supplemented Elijah as a reincarnated prophet of reform. While John gives no names to his two witnesses it is perfectly apparent that they are Elijah, who formerly had stopped the rains and called down fire from heaven,[1] and Moses, who had caused the waters of Egypt to be turned into blood and had brought many other plagues upon the oppressors of the Hebrews.[2] The idea that these two persons existed in heaven as two olive trees and two lampstands is due to imagery appropriated from Zech. 4:1–4.

The function of Elijah and Moses in their new incarnation will be to prophesy for three and a half years. Apparently their preaching will be directed especially against the heathen,

[1] I Kings 17:1; II Kings 1:10. [2] Exod. 7:14 ff.

for whom they will be so conspicuous a source of torment that the death of these two witnesses will be hailed with great delight. But the heathen's joy will quickly turn to astonishment when the bodies of the prophets are marvelously resuscitated and transported to heaven. A sympathetic convulsion of nature, causing a destructive earthquake, is expected to call forth a special ascription of glory to God. Possibly John is here thinking more particularly of Jews in Jerusalem, who heretofore had rejected Christianity. That Jerusalem is the place where these events are to transpire is made evident by the reference to Jesus' crucifixion. And the city is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt because unconverted Jews by their rejection of Christ have brought upon themselves a ruin like that which overtook Sodom, and are as unfortunate as were their ancestors in bondage to the Egyptians.

The forty-two months of gentile supremacy, equal in ancient reckoning to the twelve hundred and sixty days of the two witnesses' activity, is identical with the mysterious period of waiting alluded to in 10:7. The idea is derived from Daniel's "time (one year), times (two years), and a half (six months)."

Therefore this scene brings to a close John's visions of that period of future distress during which time God will seem to leave the world to suffer its agonies unrelieved. As the third woe is introduced still more terrible sufferings are to overtake the righteous, but during this final period of their distress the celestial powers will no longer withhold relief, but will participate actively in the final conflict. Thus after a long digression in his visions (10:1 ff.) John is ready to learn that the second woe is past, and that a picture of the third woe is about to be thrown upon the screen.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAST WOE (REV. 11:15—18:24)

Up to this point John has described various forms of distress to occur during the preliminary stages of the great tribulation. Christians have been encouraged to endure these afflictions with equanimity, confident that God Almighty and his glorious Messiah are in a position of supremacy in heaven. Several scenes in the seer's visions were designed to confirm belief in the ultimate safety of the saints and the final overthrow of sinners. Yet the increase of evils upon earth has been permitted to progress without any very serious attempt at corrective intervention on the part of the celestial powers. John seems to have assumed that God would remain passive until the agonies of the last times had reached a specific climax. The culminating event in the multiplication of disasters was to be a final desecration of the Holy City when the rampant forces of wickedness would kill the two heavenly witnesses even as Jesus had been slain. This future catastrophe was the last scene in the description of the so-called

second woe revealed to John after the blowing of the sixth trumpet.

The trumpet-blast of the seventh angel serves to reveal to the seer that the divine purposes have reached a new stage. At this point in the course of future events God will no longer remain passive toward the woes which the times of tribulation inflict upon the saints, but will actively begin the process of asserting his own sovereignty in the world. True, this period of final conflict is to witness sufferings greater than any yet experienced by mortals. It is to be the time of the third and greatest of woes, yet this acceleration of evils has its compensations. It is a direct result of Satan's supreme effort to make the most of the remaining time at his disposal, and thus these distresses are an indirect evidence that at last God has actively intervened. John has now reached the supreme moment in his apocalyptic visions, where the outstanding events in the final period of distress pass before his eye.

The first disclosure of this new section of Revelation is an emphatic declaration that God now actively assumes his right of sovereignty over the world (11:15–19). Then follows another vision depicting an attack of Satan

upon the Messiah and the preservation of the latter in heaven where he awaits the time to perform his part in the righting of the world's ills (12:1–6). God's aggressive action is first exhibited in the ejection of Satan from the heavens (12:7–17). Formerly Satan's activities had extended even up to the celestial regions, but when he is no longer privileged to be the accuser of mankind in heaven he will institute new tortures for those who live upon earth, directing his anger especially against the Christians. He will employ as his agents a vicious Roman emperor, the "beast," who will demand universal worship of himself (12:18—13:10). An energetic priest, who is also a unique representative of Satan, will assist the emperor in imposing his blasphemous demands upon all the inhabitants of the earth (13:11–18). This display of agonies is temporarily relieved by a vision of a group of victorious saints in company with the Messiah standing upon Mount Zion (14:1–5). A series of angels pronounce doom upon the beast's worshipers (14:6–13) and declare that the wrath of divine judgment is about to overtake sinners (14:14–20). A picture is shown of the preparations being made in heaven for the early exhibition

of God's wrath (15:1—16:1). The preliminary expression of his anger takes the form of distressing plagues which bring disaster to the worshipers of the emperor (16:2–9) and to the imperial régime (16:10–21). In order that there may be no mistake regarding the real object of divine wrath, John is granted a special vision unmistakably identifying Rome as the Satanic agency whose overthrow has been decreed (chap. 17). A specific pronouncement of doom upon Rome (18:1–8) is followed by a description of loud lamentation on the part of heathen kings and traders as they witness her downfall (18:9–20). By a symbolic act a powerful angel pronounces utter ruin upon the great heathen city (18:21–24).

I. DECLARATION OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY (11:15–19)

11:15 *When the seventh angel blew his trumpet loud*
voices in heaven exclaimed: The rulership of the
world has been assumed by our Lord and his
Messiah and he will reign throughout eternity.
16 *Also the twenty-four dignitaries who were en-*
throned in the presence of God prostrated them-
17 *selves and worshiped God exclaiming: We render*
thee thanks, Lord God Almighty, the one who is

and who was, because thou hast taken in hand
thy mighty power and hast assumed thy rule.
18 *The Gentiles have vented their rage upon the*
righteous, but now the time to show thy wrath has
come, when the dead are to be raised and rewards
bestowed upon thy servants the prophets, and the
saints of both low and high degree who revere thy
name, while destruction will overtake those who
have despoiled the earth.
19 *Then God's temple in heaven was opened, dis-*
closing to view the ark of his covenant within his
temple. Then there followed flashing lightnings,
terrifying sounds, pealing thunders, an earth-
quake, and a heavy hailstorm.

This vision carries the imagination of the apocalyptic seer high above the agonies of the great tribulation and so vividly discloses to him the coming triumph of God that it is described as a present reality. Since the time has now come for God to act, he bestirs himself to assume his rightful rulership of the world. Thus far the sinful Gentiles have seemed immune from the divine anger, but now the tables are to be turned and God is to wreak vengeance upon the persecutors of the saints. The mention of those who despoil the earth is clearly an allusion to imperial Rome's anticipated policy

of forcing worship of the ruler upon all his subjects. This crime is to bring down upon Rome the destructive wrath of the Almighty. A description of this divine action is the theme of this portion of John's book. The reliability of the prophecy is enhanced by a characteristic reference to the heavenly temple disclosing that most sacred object, the ark of the covenant, as a symbol that God would remember the promises of redemption given to his people. The whole scene takes on a more terrifying aspect with the references to earthquake and storm. The wrath of God is about to break upon earth with the violence of a frightful electric storm and the devastation of a fearful seismic disturbance.

II. SATAN'S ATTACK UPON THE MESSIAH (12:1–6)

12:1 *A marvelous omen appeared in the sky in the*
form of a woman clothed with the sun, having the
moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars
2 *on her head. She was pregnant and cried aloud*
with pain as she labored to give birth to her child.
3 *Then another omen suddenly appeared in the*
sky in the form of a great fiery-red dragon with
seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems on his

4 *heads. His tail swept up the third part of the stars*
of heaven and hurled them upon the earth. And
the dragon took his stand in front of the woman who
was about to be delivered, in order that when she
gave birth to her child he might devour it.
5 *Then she brought forth a son, a male child,*
who is about to rule all the Gentiles with a rod of
iron, and her child was transported to God to his
6 *throne. The woman also fled into the desert where*
she found a place prepared for her by God, in
order that she might be kept alive there for twelve
hundred and sixty days.

In the final conflict about to be seen by John in his visions, Satan himself unwittingly takes the initiative by boldly designing an attack upon the Messiah. The participants in this scene are pictured as two astral beings, one a marvelous woman and the other a dreadful dragon. Both figures were probably suggested to John by imagery current in his immediate environment. Among different ancient peoples extravagant mythological fancy had created various pictures representing a conflict in the heavens between natural forces of light or life and similar powers of darkness or death. By John's day this primitive fancy had crystallized into various myths concretely depicting

a struggle between opposing supernatural powers. Among Babylonians, Egyptians, and Greeks this type of imagery had wide currency, and each of these sources has been suggested as the origin of John's figures. The closest parallel is furnished by the Greek story of Leto persecuted by the dragon Python before she gave birth to Apollo. This legend would be especially familiar to the peoples of western Asia Minor, and it may have furnished the model for John's vision.

Not the historical genesis of the imagery, however, but its prophetic significance was of prime importance for John. To the details of the picture he probably attached no special value, his main interest being to depict the fact of the conflict. He was describing anticipated future events, and in this incident he saw one of those strange phenomena of the latter days representing Satan's hostility toward the Messiah. Of course the woman was not supposed to be the earthly mother of Jesus. Long before this date he had been born, crucified, and exalted to a position of unique authority in heaven. But at this future moment he would temporarily assume the form of an infant born of a strange astral mother in order that Satan's

animosity toward him might find opportunity for concrete expression. Such was John's expectation as depicted in this vision.

The fiery-red dragon is clearly a personification of Satan. As seen by John, he is distinctly an astral monster, with a comet-like tail large enough to include in its sweep one-third of the stars. He is awaiting the birth of the woman's son, whom the seer specifically calls a "male child" in order to suggest to his readers the messianic terminology of Isa. 66:7. Reference to his authority over the Gentiles is another device for indicating his messianic prerogatives. But Satan's designs upon the child are foiled. The Messiah is snatched away to a place of safety in heaven, where his previous abode had been; and God intervenes to provide the woman a shelter in the desert. The rage of the dragon is to continue twelve hundred and sixty days, that is, three and a half years, when his complete overthrow will be accomplished. This number evidently is derived from the same source as the period of time mentioned in 11:2 f. Apparently John divided the last tribulation into two parts, each to continue three and one-half years. The preliminary period would close with the disaster to Jerusalem described in

11:13, and the second period with the fall of Rome and the overthrow of Satan (chap. 19). In the present connection reference is made to the duration of the final conflict, the second period of three and a half years, to end with the destruction of the Roman Empire.

III. EJECTION OF SATAN FROM THE HEAVENS (12:7–17)

12:7 *Then a great battle took place in the sky as*
Michael and his angels fought with the dragon.
The dragon and his angels also fought, but they
8 *did not prevail, nor were they permitted any*
9 *longer to retain their place in the sky. But the*
dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the devil
and Satan, who leads astray all the inhabitants
of the earth, was hurled down to the earth, and his
10 *angels were hurled down with him. Thereupon I*
heard a loud voice in heaven exclaiming: Now
the salvation and the power and the rulership of
our God and the authority of his Messiah have
come to pass; for the accuser of our brethren, he
who brought accusations against them before our
11 *God day and night, has been hurled down, and*
they too have triumphed over him through the
efficacy of the Lamb's blood and their loyalty
to the word of the testimony, for they did not

12 *cling to life even in the face of death. Therefore*
let the heavens and those who dwell therein rejoice,
but woe to the earth and the sea because the devil
has descended upon you in a mighty rage knowing
that he has only a short time left.
13 *When the dragon perceived that he had been*
hurled down to earth, he pursued the woman who
14 *brought forth the male child, but she was furnished*
with the two wings of the great eagle in order that
she might fly to her place in the desert where for
a time, times, and a half time, she is to be kept
15 *alive safe from the sight of the serpent. The*
serpent also hurled out of his mouth after the
woman a stream of water resembling a river in an
16 *effort to engulf her in the stream. But the earth*
aided the woman by opening its mouth and swal-
lowing up the river which the dragon hurled out
17 *of his mouth. Thus in a rage at the woman the*
dragon turned away to wage war with the rest of
her kin who keep the commandments of God and
adhere to the testimony of Jesus.

The first effect of God's new assumption of sovereignty will be the ejection of Satan from the celestial regions, where he had previously been conducting a campaign against mankind. His habit of slandering mortals before God is mentioned in various earlier Jewish sources,

from which John appropriated the idea.[1] Therefore the first item in the relief of the saints' distresses is to be the elimination of their heavenly adversary. The archangel Michael, who is the traditional angelic guardian of Israel,[2] will lead in the conflict to overthrow Satan. This initial catastrophe for Satan will also be a triumph for Christians. It will not only remove all hostility toward them in heaven, but once Satan's kingdom has begun to crumble the prospect of its complete downfall grows more hopeful. Two causes combined in securing this initial victory for the saints. The blood shed by Jesus and the Christians' unswerving loyalty to the instruction which they had received from Christ ultimately aroused the heavenly powers to action.

Satan's removal from the heavens will, however, mean only a partial victory for Christians. In fact, temporarily their status upon earth will become even more distressing as a result of the dragon's defeat by Michael. In consequence of exclusion from the celestial regions the fierceness of the demons' activities upon earth will be greatly augmented. This phase of John's

[1] Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6; Zech. 3:1 f.; I En. 40:7.

[2] Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude, vs. 9.

thinking is in line with the speculations of his Jewish predecessors, who commonly depicted an increase of evil in the last times. The pursuit of the woman and the attempt to overcome her with a flood of water are picturesque details probably derived from gentile speculation, with which John here supplements his apocalyptic heritage. The great eagle whose wings are given to the woman to aid her in flight is also a characteristic creation of gentile fancy. When the dragon is thwarted in his designs upon the woman he will proceed to vent his spite upon the Christians who are the woman's kin or "seed," simply in the sense that they, like herself, and the male child whom she bore, are common objects of Satan's hatred. It is futile to seek for a specific historical counterpart of this astral maiden. John's vision is concerned with anticipated future happenings in which the presence of this strange woman serves simply to heighten the impressiveness of the picture. The one point which the seer desires to stress is the violence of Satan's rage which is ultimately to be directed against those Christians who remain upon earth. Again, as previously in 12:6 and subsequently in 13:5, this closing period of

suffering is expected to endure three and a half years.

IV. THE IMPERIAL BEAST (12:18—13:10)

12:18 *Then I took my stand upon the sandy shore of*
13:1 *the sea, and I saw coming up out of the sea a beast with ten horns and seven heads. There were ten diadems upon his horns and blasphemous words were inscribed upon his heads. The beast which*
2 *I saw resembled a leopard, but his feet were like those of a bear and his mouth like that of a lion. And the dragon assigned him his own power and his own throne and great authority.*
3 *One of his heads bore the mark of a violent death, but the place where he had received this*
4 *fatal blow was healed. The whole earth gazed wonderingly after the beast, and men worshiped the dragon because he gave authority to the beast. They also worshiped the beast, and exclaimed,*
5 *Who is there like the beast, and who is able to fight with him? He was provided with a voice to utter boastings and blasphemies, and was permitted to continue his activities for forty-*
6 *two months. He opened his mouth to speak blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling-place and those who dwell in heaven.*

7 *He was also permitted to wage war with the*
saints and to triumph over them, and was given
authority over every tribe and people and tongue
8 *and nation. And all the inhabitants of the earth*
will worship him, whose name from the beginning
of the world has not been found written in the
slain Lamb's book of life.
9 *If anyone has an ear let him hear this: If*
anyone is destined for captivity, into captivity he
10 *will go; if anyone kills with a sword, with a*
sword must he be killed. On this certainty rest
the patient endurance and fidelity of the saints.

In this vision John learns of the unique plan which the Satanic dragon will devise for wreaking his vengeance upon Christians. He will authorize a fearful beast to exercise his power upon earth. As described by John, this beast is clearly a future ruler of the Roman Empire, who will blasphemously set himself up as a deity demanding worship of all his subjects. The recent experiences of John and his fellow-Christians in resisting emperor-worship have led him to believe that the final outburst of Satanic wickedness in the world will be a more aggravated form of this same type of affliction. The beast who is to rule upon earth in the last times is so described that his identity could

hardly be mistaken by any Christian of John's day. Certain details of the picture of the beast are derived from Dan. 7:2 ff., but enough original features are introduced to make it perfectly evident that the seer has pre-eminently in mind the recent efforts to force the worship of Domitian upon Christians, and that in future they may expect the imperial throne to be occupied by another ruler who, in his hostility toward the followers of Christ, will be a veritable incarnation of Satan.

This grotesque creature will have a scar on one of his heads that serves the purposes of further identification. John perceives that the beast in a previous incarnation had met a violent death and still bears the evidences of the fatal sword thrust by which he had fallen. In a subsequent connection we also learn that this last imperial monstrosity is to be the reincarnation of a previous emperor (17:8 ff.). These allusions point to a belief in the return of Nero, whom the Christians remembered as their first imperial persecutor. It was a historical fact that Nero had met his death by plunging a dagger into his own throat, and legends regarding his reappearance were rife in John's day. Nero had impressed even the Roman populace

as an uncanny person, of whose real death there was some doubt. As early as the year 69 A.D. it was commonly rumored that he was still alive and in hiding in the East, whence he would return to resume control of the Empire. Relying upon this report, pretenders arose from time to time, claiming to impersonate Nero. This belief in a Nero *redivivus* excited interest, especially in the provinces of Achaia (Greece) and Asia, and was still current in the second decade of the second century. The idea was also taken up by the Jewish author of the Sibylline Oracles. It is not at all surprising that John should appropriate the legend so widely current,[1] especially in view of Nero's reputation as an enemy of Christianity.

The characteristic activity of the beast will be a demand for worship of himself. The blasphemous words inscribed upon his heads are deific titles such as were habitually conferred upon gentile rulers by their admiring subjects. Among these customary epithets were the terms "God," "Son of God," and "Lord."[2] The

[1] Suetonius *Nero* 57; Tacitus *Hist.* ii. 8; Dio Chrysostom *Orat.* xxi. 9 f.; Sib. Or. iv. 119 f., 137 ff.; v. 28 ff., 137 f., 215 ff., 362 ff.; Asc. Isa. 4:2 f.

[2] S. J. Case, *Evolution of Early Christianity* (Chicago, 1914), pp. 209 ff.

Satanic emperor of the last days will not only receive these titles but will institute an aggressive propaganda boasting of his own divine supremacy. Thus he will arrogate to himself those prerogatives which Christians regard as belonging exclusively to the God of heaven and his celestial associates. The result will be severe persecution for the followers of Christ, while all other persons throughout the Empire will adopt Caesar-worship. This unhappy state of affairs will continue for three and a half years (forty-two months), which is identical with the period allotted to Satan for his final depredations upon earth (13:5; 12:6, 14).

The outlook for Christians during these closing days of distress would be dark indeed were it not for an oracular word of wisdom which John is able to communicate to everyone who has the ear of understanding, a faculty which presumably is possessed by all faithful Christians. For a time the beast may arrogantly set himself up as a deity, but the saints will note that his name is lacking in the Lamb's book of life. Since calamity awaits everyone whose name is missing from this celestial register, the beast is foredoomed to disaster. He is destined for sure captivity, when he will be

chained and confined within the burning pit of the abyss (19:19 f.), while his agents who arrest and kill Christians are similarly destined to be slain by the sword projecting from the mouth of the victorious Messiah when he comes in triumph to set up his kingdom (19:21). Confident in this outcome of events, Christians will patiently endure the strain of final persecution and remain faithful to Christ by refusing to worship the Satanic monster who will temporarily hold sway over the Roman world.[1]

[1] The foregoing explanation of Rev. 13:8–10 differs radically from the current interpretation of this passage. Commentators usually assume that (1) in vs. 8 it is not the emperor but his worshipers whose name is missing from the book of life; that (2) the captivity mentioned in vs. 10 refers to the treatment being meted out to Christians rather than to the fate awaiting the emperor; and that (3) the remark about the sword is not a prediction of the persecutor's fate, but is a warning against a disposition on the part of Christians to employ force in resisting the imperial authorities.

The reasons for deviating from these generally accepted opinions are, briefly stated, as follows: (1) The best attested form of the relative in vs. 8 is the singular οὗ, of which the natural antecedent is αὐτόν, referring to the beast. To be sure, solecisms are common enough in Revelation, but when the author wished also to state that the names of the beast's worshipers were not written in the book of life he knew how to use the plural of the relative, as in fact he did in 17:8. (2) It was in perfect accord with the author's thinking to affirm that the name of the beast as well as that of his worshipers was not included in the heavenly register of the redeemed. Even as late as Tertullian's day it was still thought impossible for an emperor to become a Christian

V. THE PRIEST OF THE IMPERIAL CULT (13:11–18)

13:11 *Then I saw coming up out of the earth another*
beast, which had two horns like a lamb, but he
12 *spoke like a dragon. He possessed full authority*
to act on behalf of the first beast, making the earth
and all its inhabitants worship the first beast,
13 *whose fatal wound had been healed. He also*
performs marvelous feats, even causing fire to
come down from heaven to earth in the presence of

(*Apol.* 21). (3) That monstrous sinners, and particularly impious tyrants, were destined to eternal punishment in the lower world, was an idea not unknown to later Judaism and one that was especially common in John's gentile environment. Typical attestations are: Homer *Odys.* xi. 576 ff.; Pindar *Olymp.* ii. 56 ff.; Plato *Gorgias* 525; *Republic* 615; Virgil *Aen.* vi. 559–627; Plutarch *Soc. Daem.* 22, *Concerning Whom God Is Slow to Punish* 22; Suetonius *Tiberius* 75; Lucian *True Hist.* ii. 31; *Cataplus* 29. (4) Ultimate captivity in the burning pit of hell is exactly the fate to which John subsequently consigns this imperial beast (17:8, 11; 19:20; 20:10). (5) To infer that Christians meditated armed resistance of their persecutors is a supposition quite out of harmony with the entire atmosphere of Revelation. Nor was this a tendency of early Christianity against which John might suspect his readers to need to be warned. But slaughter of Christians by representatives of the emperor was exactly what he anticipated. (6) As subsequently described by John, the supporters of the beast are to be slain by the sword that projects from the Messiah's mouth (19:21). (7) If punishment of Christianity's enemies rather than a warning against revolution is the sense of vs. 10, then the obscure ὧδέ ἐστιν can be taken as referring to the ground of Christian patience, as is clearly the case again in 14:12.

14 *men. Leading astray the inhabitants of the earth*
by means of the feats which he was permitted to
perform on behalf of the beast, he commands the
inhabitants of the earth to make an image for the
beast who has been revived, although still bearing
15 *the mark of the fatal sword thrust. And he was*
permitted to give breath to the image of the beast
so that the image of the beast should even speak,
and should decree that everyone be put to death
16 *who refuses to worship the beast's image. He also*
requires that everybody, both the lowly and the
mighty, the rich and the poor, the free men and
the slaves, be marked with a stamp upon their
17 *right hand or upon their forehead, and that no*
one can buy or sell unless he has been stamped
with the name of the beast or with the number
corresponding to his name.
18 *In this fact lies hidden wisdom. Let him who*
has understanding calculate the number of the
beast, for it is a certain man's number, and the
number is 666.

The imperial beast will be supported by another monster, lamblike in appearance but vicious in his utterances. His mission will be to effect universal acceptance of the imperial cult. He is the chief priest of the cult, and a zealous propagandist who employs numerous devices

for inducing all the inhabitants of the Mediterranean World to worship the Satanic emperor. In John's day it was not uncommon for propagandists of different religions to appeal to miracles in support of their respective cults. The priests often managed to perform striking feats which the common people readily accepted as supernatural. This situation furnished the setting for John's picture of the methods to be employed by the chief priest of the imperial cult who would officiate during the period of final distress. As a means of accrediting the cult the priest would call down fire from heaven and would equip the beast's image with both breath and speech. As again in 16:14, so here John does not seem to doubt the reality of these wonders. It was not the custom among early Christians to question their pagan contemporaries' ability to work miracles, but Christians did affirm that pagan wonders were simply marvelous works of Satan and not deeds of God.

The demonic priest of the imperial cult would prove so efficient and thoroughgoing that worship of the emperor would be forced upon all classes of society and would dominate all economic activities. John imagines that this end will be attained by requiring all traders to

have a license issued by the imperial authorities in the form of a stamp to be impressed upon the forehead or the hand. Naturally such a stamp would imprint the letters of the imperial beast's name, or possibly a license number. This suggests to John a piece of cryptic wisdom by means of which he is able to furnish an additional clue to the identification of the monster who is to rule over the Empire in the closing days of final agony. By summing up the numerical values of the letters in the beast's name it will be found to coincide with the number of a certain man, the number being 666. Thus again John alludes to Nero. By an occult process, calculating the numerical value of the name Nero Caesar, written in Hebrew (Aramaic) letters (קסר נרון), a total of 666 is obtained. This was a word of "wisdom" that could be understood only by one who knew the Hebrew alphabet, but perhaps that very fact seemed to John all the more significant.

Both the first and the second beast depicted by John are monsters to appear upon earth in the future after Satan has been ejected from heaven and begins his final war upon the saints. The sufferings of Christians in John's own day are only foreshadowings of future events. The

emperor Domitian and the priests of his cult in Asia are not counterparts but are only forerunners of the beasts which John has been describing. Undoubtedly Domitian and his agents furnished John his point of departure, and to some extent his model, but the art of the seer was also creative, and it would be absurd to imagine that every detail of the picture can be duplicated in the events of his own time. Moreover, he aims to depict, not scenes from real life, but the heightened calamities of the last times, when the infamous Nero, returning to earth as the special agent of Satan, will institute a period of fiendish persecution in comparison with which the sufferings of Christians under Domitian will sink into relative insignificance.

VI. A TRIUMPHANT GROUP OF SAINTS (14:1–5)

14:1 *Then in my vision I beheld the Lamb standing upon Mount Zion and in company with him were a hundred and forty-four thousand persons with his name and the name of his father inscribed on*
2 *their foreheads. And I heard issuing from heaven a sound resembling the roaring of mighty breakers and the rumbling of loud thunder. The sound which I heard was like the singing of harpists*

3 *while playing upon their harps, and they sang a*
new song as they stood before the throne and before
the four living creatures and the four dignitaries.
No one was able to learn that song except the one
hundred and forty-four thousand who had been
4 *purchased from the earth. These are persons who*
have not been polluted by marriage, for they are
virgins. They are the followers of the Lamb where-
ever he goes. As a first fruit for God and the
Lamb they have been purchased from among men.
5 *They have never been known to speak a lie; they*
are irreproachable.

This vision sets faithful Christians in sharp contrast with the heathen who worship the emperor and receive his mark upon their foreheads or their right hands. John sees a picture of a select group of saints standing upon Mount Zion in the company of Christ, and he hears the music of a new song which they alone will be able to learn. Although there are exactly a hundred and forty-four thousand of these individuals, it is not apparent that the seer means to identify them with the same number of redeemed Israelites whom he has seen in a previous vision (7:4 ff.). They resemble more closely the special company of the faithful who are to occupy Jerusalem with Christ during the

millennium (20:4–6). As a group of exceptionally perfect saints they represent the first-fruits of the harvest of the righteous to be gathered for God and Christ.

With this picture of early triumph in mind John would have future generations of Christians courageously resist the demands of the beast when the time of final testing arrives. But the seer is able to offer his readers still further assurances. Not only are the saints sure of an early reward, but in his fight against God the beast is doomed to early defeat. Both the Satanic emperor and the kingdom over which he presides are destined for destruction. In the scenes which follow John narrates a series of visions forecasting at considerable length the fate to overtake Rome as a result of her antagonism toward Christians.

VII. FATE OF THE BEAST'S WORSHIPERS (14:6–13)

14:6 *Then I saw another angel flying in mid-air*
with a message of eternal truth to announce to
those who live upon the earth, even to every nation
7 *and tribe and tongue and people. With a loud*
voice he exclaimed: Fear God and render him
glory, for the hour of his judgment has come;

therefore worship him who made heaven and earth
8 *and sea and fountains of waters. Again a second*
angel followed, exclaiming: Fallen, fallen is the
mighty Babylon who has caused all the nations
to drink of the wine of the divine anger incurred
9 *by her fornication. Again a third angel following*
the others exclaimed with a loud voice: If anyone
worships the beast and his image and receives a
10 *stamp upon his forehead or upon his hand, he*
also will drink of the wine of God's wrath mixed at
full strength in the cup of his anger, and will be
tormented with fire and brimstone in the sight of the
11 *holy angels and in the sight of the Lamb; and the*
smoke from their place of torment continues to
ascend throughout eternity; nor will those who wor-
ship the beast and his image, or anyone who receives
the stamp of his name, find any release either day
12 *or night from their torment. On this fact rests the*
patient endurance of the saints who remain true to
the commands of God and to their faith in Jesus.
13 *Then I heard a voice from heaven exclaiming:*
Write, Blessed are the dead who from this time
forth die as Christians. Indeed, says the Spirit,
they will find rest from their toils, for their good
deeds will accompany them.

Previously John has described the reward of the saints as an inducement to fidelity on

the part of Christians in their conflict with the beast (14:1–5). The next vision reveals the unhappy fate awaiting those who, yielding to the seductions of Satan, will worship the emperor during the period of final testing. An angelic voice announces that in view of imminent judgment all men should make haste to worship the creator only. Then a second messenger decrees the fall of Rome, here called Babylon, after the allegorical usage of apocalyptic style previously illustrated in 11:8. The city of Rome, representative of the imperial demonic régime, is accused of having brought all peoples under the condemnation of divine wrath by inducing them to join with her in the worship of Satan's representative, the imperial beast. Employing the term in the figurative sense common among the Jews, John designates such idolatrous procedure as fornication. A third angel solemnly specifies the exact nature of the offense to be compliance with the demands of the future demonic emperor and his priest whose activities were prophetically depicted in chapter 13. All who yield to these demands will be overtaken by a fearful and everlasting punishment, the details of which are to be revealed more fully in subsequent revela-

tions (19:20 f.; 20:9–15). This certainty is said to furnish Christians a sure basis for loyally adhering to their own faith, even though they may be slain on account of their opposition to the beast. They are provided with an additional guaranty of blessing, pronounced by another celestial voice upon those who may die with this type of good deeds to their credit on the records of heaven.

VIII. A FORECAST OF JUDGMENT (14:14–20)

14:14 *Then I beheld in my vision a white cloud and upon the cloud sat a being resembling a man with a gold crown upon his head and a sharp sickle*
15 *in his hand. And another angel emerging from the temple shouted with a loud voice to him who sat upon the cloud, Apply your sickle and reap, for the time to reap has come because earth's*
16 *harvest is ripened. Then he who sat upon the cloud thrust forth his sickle upon the earth, and the earth was harvested.*
17 *Then another angel emerging from the temple*
18 *of God in heaven also had a sharp sickle. And another angel who presides over the fire emerged from the altar and called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, Apply your sharp sickle and harvest the clusters from earth's vine, for its*

19 *grapes have ripened. Then the angel thrust forth*
his sharp sickle to earth and harvested earth's
vine, casting the grapes into the great winepress
20 *of God's wrath. The winepress was trodden out-*
side the city, and for a distance of two hundred
miles there flowed forth from the winepress a stream
of blood so deep that it reached even to the horses'
bridles.

Here John witnesses a series of symbolic acts performed by a number of angelic beings who forecast the destruction that is to overtake sinners. The harvesting of grain and the gathering of grapes furnish the imagery used in this picture, which anticipates the more detailed account of events attending the judgment, to be described in its logical place in 19:11 ff. Now that the seer's visions have carried him forward to the period of the two beasts' enormities, the judgment is so near and so certain that he feels no inconsistency in looking upon a picture typical of the impending event. While the general import of the description is clear, some of the details are obscure. The figure seated upon the white cloud is coordinated with other "angels," but his likeness to a "man" suggests that he is the Messiah. Yet the conquering Messiah who actually

executes the judgment described more at length in 19:11–16, instead of using a sickle, slaughters his enemies with the sword that projects from his mouth. This contrast in the two pictures probably is due to the use of different forms of traditional imagery appropriated by the author, who in both instances undoubtedly has the Messiah in mind. His reference to the horses' bridles in verse 20 also suggests that he is thinking of the part to be played by the horsemen of the Messiah's army which appears upon the scene in 19:14. The city on whose outskirts the slaughter of the wicked is to occur may be either Jerusalem or Rome, but more probably John means the latter, since this was the capital of the beast's empire. However, in Jewish tradition, which was the ultimate source of John's imagery, the judgment was to be staged at Jerusalem or in its vicinity.[1] The enormous shedding of blood is also a feature of Jewish apocalyptic descriptions. In Enoch it is said that streams will flow with the blood of the slain so deep that "the horse shall walk up to the breast in the blood of sinners and the chariot shall be submerged to its height."[2]

[1] Joel 3:12f.; Zech. 14:4; IV Ezra 13:35; Bar. 40:1.

[2] I En. 100:1–3.

IX. PREPARATIONS IN HEAVEN (15:1—16:1)

15:1 *I saw yet another great and marvelous omen*
in heaven in the form of seven angels with seven
plagues which are the last plagues, for by means
of them the wrath of God finds full expression.
2 *I saw an expanse resembling a sea made of*
glass mingled with fire, and standing upon the
sea of glass with harps given them by God, were
those who conquer by refusing to worship the beast
and his image and to be marked with the number
3 *of his name. They sing the song of God's servant*
Moses, and the song of the Lamb: Great and
marvelous are thy doings, Lord God Almighty;
righteous and unerring are thy ways, O thou king
4 *of the nations. Who will not surely fear thee, O*
Lord, and give glory to thy name because thou only
art holy! For all nations shall come and worship
before thee because thy righteous judgments have
been revealed.
5 *Afterwards again I saw the temple, which is the*
tabernacle of testimony, thrown open in heaven,
6 *and there came forth from the temple the seven*
angels who had the seven plagues. They were
clothed in shining white linen and wore gold girdles
7 *about their breasts. Then one of the four living*
creatures gave the angels seven gold bowls full of
the wrath of God who lives throughout eternity,

8 *and the temple was filled with smoke from the glory and the power of God, so that no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues in charge of the seven angels were inflicted upon the*
16:1 *earth. I also heard a loud voice emanating from the temple say to the angels, Go and pour out upon the earth the seven bowls of God's wrath.*

This vision pictures the coming of the time when God will smite down sinners in his anger. The final stage of wrath is depicted in the form of seven terrible plagues to be let loose upon the Roman Empire in punishment for its acceptance of the imperial cult. These plagues recall the similar afflictions which fell upon the world during the earlier stages of the great tribulation (chaps. 8 f.), but the last plagues now about to be revealed greatly exceed in severity those of the earlier vision. The resemblance, however, is sufficiently close to suggest that each group represents a development of the same apocalyptic interest which depicted a series of plagues to occur in the last times. We have already observed that John doubled the length of the traditional period of distress by allowing three and a half years for the time of tribulation preceding the appearance of the beast, and another three and a half years for

the activities of the beast.[1] Hence it was inevitable that the events of the second period should in a measure parallel those of the first, since the descriptive details in each case were often derived from the same traditional source of apocalyptic imagery.

The solemnity of the scene is heightened by an account of the celestial preparations to precede the final exhibition of God's wrath. Those who have died for refusing to worship the beast are seen standing upon the glassy sea of heaven where God's throne rests (4:6). Since lightning as well as rain descended from the sky, the celestial ocean was thought to have fire mingled with its crystal waters. The song of the triumphant saints is one of victory, like that of Moses and his companions after they had successfully escaped from Egypt,[2] or such a song as the Lamb might have sung after his triumph over the cross and the grave. The burden of the song is the ascription to God of all glory and power.

The temple of heaven is the prototype of both the Temple at Jerusalem and the tent of earlier times. The wrath of God is thought of in a quantitative way—is hypostatized—as a

[1] See above, p. 305. [2] Exod., chap. 15.

liquid substance that can be poured into bowls. The glory and the power of God are similarly hypostatized, being pictured as smoke filling the celestial temple and refusing to clear away until the divine anger has been appeased by the destruction of the Roman world.

X. JUDGMENT UPON THE EMPEROR'S SUBJECTS (16:2–9)

16:2 *The first angel went forth and emptied his bowl upon the earth. Then a loathsome and painful ulcer afflicted those persons who bore the mark of* 3 *the beast and worshiped his image. The second angel emptied his bowl upon the sea, which turned to coagulated blood like that of a corpse, and every* 4 *creature that lives in the sea perished. The third angel emptied his bowl upon the rivers and the fountains of the waters, and they also turned to* 5 *blood. And I heard the guardian angel of the waters exclaim, Righteous art thou—the holy one* 6 *who was and is—for thou hast executed thy judgment upon those who spilled blood of prophets and saints. Therefore thou hast given them blood* 7 *to drink, as they deserve. And I heard the heavenly altar exclaim, Verily, Lord God Almighty, un-* 8 *erring and righteous are thy judgments. The fourth angel emptied his bowl on the sun, which*

9 *was permitted to burn mankind with its heat, and men were afflicted with terrible heat, but they reviled God who had control of these plagues and they would not repent and give him glory.*

The first four plagues exhibited in this vision are to afflict more especially the subjects of the emperor, while the last three (16:10–21) are aimed more directly at him and his kingdom. The seer assumes that by this time all the pagan population of the Roman world will have yielded to the seductions of Satan and will have become votaries of the imperial cult. Therefore they will be fitting objects of God's avenging wrath. In addition to their idolatrous enormities they will also have shed much innocent blood of Christian prophets and saints. Hence they are to be overtaken by divine judgments similar to those which fell upon the Egyptians who had afflicted the people of God in days of old. The plagues which smote the Egyptians formed the model for the present description of divine punishments, as was similarly the case with the distresses depicted in the eighth and ninth chapters of Revelation, where the seer prophesies the agonies of the last times preceding the coming of the beast. The new features appearing in the present connection are appropriate to

the new situation, when the beast is exercising his power. The solemnity of the scene is heightened by a declaration of the guardian angel of the waters, to the effect that the enemies of Christianity are merely receiving their due. The perversity of these sinners is emphasized again, as in 9:20, by noting their unwillingness to repent.

XI. JUDGMENT UPON THE IMPERIAL RÉGIME (16:10–21)

16:10 *The fifth angel emptied his bowl on the throne*
of the beast, and a pall of darkness spread over
his empire while his subjects, gnawing their
11 *tongues in agony, reviled the God of heaven for*
their sufferings and their ulcers, and repented not
12 *of their deeds. The sixth angel emptied his bowl*
upon the great river Euphrates, thus causing its
waters to dry up in order that the way may be
13 *made ready for the kings from the east. Then I*
saw three evil spirits resembling frogs emerge from
the mouth of the dragon and of the beast and of
14 *the false prophet. Now they are demonic spirits*
who perform wonders and go forth to the kings of
all the world to gather them for a battle, to occur
on the great day of God Almighty. (Behold I am
15 *coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches and*

keeps his garments ready in order that he may
16 *not go naked and be put to shame.) And the*
demonic spirits gathered the kings at the place
called in Hebrew Harmagedon.
17 *The seventh angel emptied his bowl on the air*
and a loud voice issuing out of the temple and
from the throne exclaimed, It is come to pass.
18 *Then followed flashing lightnings, terrifying*
sounds, and pealing thunders, and there was a
great earthquake. So great and terrible an earth-
quake as this has never before been witnessed
19 *since man lived upon the earth. The great city*
was shattered into three pieces, and the cities of
the nations fell. Thus the mighty Babylon was
remembered in the presence of God by inflicting
upon her the cup of the wine of his fierce anger.
20 *Every island disappeared, and no mountain*
21 *remained to be seen. Also huge hailstones of about*
one hundred pounds each, fell from the sky upon
men, and they reviled God on account of the
plague of hail because the distress caused by it
was exceedingly great.

The last three angels released plagues that forecast the complete overthrow of the Roman Empire. The royal seat of the beast was the object of the fifth angel's attack, with the result that heavy darkness like that of the ninth

Egyptian plague is seen to envelop the entire kingdom. This affliction will pass only to be followed by a still more calamitous event. Demonic spirits emerge to summon the forces of evil for the final conflict in which they are to suffer disastrous defeat before the triumphant Messiah. Thus this vision anticipates the more detailed account of the Messiah's victory to be described in 19:11–21. The drying up of the Euphrates will permit the wild Parthian tribes to participate in the final conflict even as they were the source of the scourge revealed when the sixth of the trumpeting angels gave the signal for introducing one of the severest afflictions of the first period of tribulation (9:14 ff.). Here John again repeats a traditional feature of early apocalyptic imagery, making it also an item in the final woe of the times of the beast. But he fuses with it the additional hostile activity of the kings of the world who are subordinate to and in full sympathy with the last Satanic emperor, an idea expressed more clearly in 17:12–18. Probably the popular gentile superstition that Nero had disappeared into Parthia, whence he would return to reclaim his kingdom by a bloody civil war, has also affected John's thinking, as it

does again in his later references to the disaster which the beast is to bring upon Rome itself (17:16). John gives the name of the place at which the great battle is to occur, but neither the origin of the term nor its geographical location is known.

Verse 15 is a parenthetical exclamation warning men to be ready for the Messiah's early advent. Momentarily the seer halts his description of the final battle in order to advise his readers of the necessity of watchful preparation. This admonitory utterance forms a distinct interruption of the context, and interpreters have often suspected that in the process of recopying the book some later scribe may have made the insertion. On the other hand, the logical processes of an apocalyptic seer are not so close-knit as to eliminate the possibility that John himself was responsible for the interruption. Mention of the great day of God Almighty would easily furnish him the incentive for this threatening exclamation.

The plague inflicted by the seventh angel carries John's vision forward to that climactic scene in which the destruction of Rome is revealed. Amid accompanying displays of unusual terror a fearful earthquake causes the magnificent mis-

tress of the world to crumble into three heaps of ruins. Thus the fierce anger of the Almighty finally comes to expression in the overthrow of Rome. In the wake of this vehement seismic display other lesser afflictions follow, adding to the agonies of the heathen peoples who still remain alive to be overtaken by slaughter when the Messiah appears, an event which has been proleptically depicted in the preceding scene.

XII. FURTHER IDENTIFICATION OF ROME (CHAP. 17)

17:1 *Then one of the seven angels with the seven bowls coming and speaking with me said: Come let me show you the fate of the great harlot who*
2 *sits upon many waters. With her the kings of the earth have committed fornication, while the inhabitants of the earth have been intoxicated with the*
3 *wine of her fornication. Then he carried me away in the spirit into a desert where I saw a woman seated upon a scarlet beast which was covered all over with blasphemous words, and which had seven*
4 *heads and ten horns. The woman was attired in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls, while in her hand was a gold cup full of the abominable things of idolatry,*
5 *even the pollutions of her fornication. On her*

forehead was inscribed the legend, "Symbol of the
mighty Babylon, the mother of harlots and of
6 *earth's abominations." I saw also that the woman*
was drunk with the blood of the saints, that is,
with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. On seeing
her I was overcome with wonder.
7 *Then the angel said to me, Why do you*
wonder? I will explain to you the symbolic
meaning of the woman, and of the seven-headed
8 *and the ten-horned beast which carries her. As*
for the beast which you saw, it once was, but no
longer is, upon earth; it will soon ascend from the
abyss, but it is destined for destruction. And
those inhabitants of the earth, whose names from
the beginning of the world have not been found
written in the book of life will marvel as they look
upon the beast that was and is not but returns.
9 *Here is an opportunity for the exercise of a*
wise understanding. The seven heads represent
the seven hills [of Rome] on which the woman sits.
10 *Also the heads represent seven emperors. Five*
have passed away, one is now ruling, the other
has not yet come into power, but when he does his
11 *rule must be brief. Then will come the beast who*
once was, but now is not, upon earth. Thus he
is an eighth, though also one of the seven, and he
12 *is destined for destruction. And the ten horns*

which you saw are ten kings, who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for a single hour will receive authority as kings in company with the
13 *beast. They will have a common aim, and will give their power and authority to the beast. To-*
14 *gether they will fight with the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer them because he is lord of lords and king of kings, and with him will be his chosen, elect, and faithful followers.*
15 *The angel also said to me, The waters on which you saw the harlot sitting represent peoples and*
16 *multitudes and nations and tongues. The ten horns which you saw and the beast will together hate the harlot, they will make her desolate and naked, they will devour her flesh, and they will burn her*
17 *with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to work his will by acting in unison, and surrendering their rulership to the beast until the*
18 *decrees of God are accomplished. Also the woman whom you saw is the great city which holds dominion over the kings of the earth.*

At the end of the preceding chapter John had been carried forward in his vision to a point where he was ready to witness a prophetic picture of the Messiah's triumphant advent. But before passing to this victorious scene (19:11 ff.) the downfall of Rome is reaffirmed

by means of several further revelations. Since the hope of Rome's overthrow was of crucial importance to the Christians of John's day, he dwells at great length upon the topic. In order that his readers may be fully assured of an early deliverance from their enemies, the seer receives minute instructions from an angel, who takes great pains to make the identification of Rome certain and also to specify the time at which her overthrow would occur.

Rome is figuratively described as a wicked woman, luxuriously attired, whose sway extends over many waters and who rides upon a monstrous beast. The blasphemous names upon the beast, together with its seven heads and ten horns, readily identify it with the great future persecuting emperor previously described in chapter 13. He will demand worship of himself from all his subjects. Again, using the characteristic figure of fornication to describe this heinous form of idolatry, the kings of the earth are charged with the crime of worshiping the emperor, while the populace has become completely intoxicated with this same iniquity. As Babylon was the iniquitous city of ancient times, so, for John, Rome was the

modern Babylon, drunk with the blood of the martyred Christians.

In interpreting the picture the angel dwells first upon the significance of the beast. It is the same monster who was introduced to the reader in chapter 13. This final representative of the imperial line is to be the reincarnation of a previous emperor, who is not upon earth when John writes, but who is to appear when the time for inaugurating the third woe arrives. John's readers are informed that the time for the imperial beast's advent is near at hand. In fact the date can be fixed within comparatively narrow limits. The seven heads of the beast represent seven emperors, and the beast himself is to be the eighth, though he is also a reincarnation of one of the previous seven. At the time when the vision is revealed to John five emperors have already ruled, and the sixth now in power is to be followed by a seventh, whose reign will be brief. Then the beast, who as already observed is an incarnation of Nero, will appear and dominate the world for three and a half years (12:6; 13:5) before the coming of the Messiah. By this method of reckoning it was possible for John to determine approximately the date of Rome's overthrow

Apparently he expected this event to occur within about a generation of his own time.

However satisfactory this chronological scheme may have seemed to John, it encounters difficulties when brought into comparison with exact statistics of Roman history. The early emperors were Augustus (27 B.C.—14 A.D.), Tiberius (14–37), Caligula (37–41), Claudius (41–54), Nero (54–68), Galba (68–69), Otho (69), Vitellius (69), Vespasian (69–79), Titus (79–81), Domitian (81–96). If John had consulted the official archives he would have learned that the sixth emperor, during whose reign he purports to have received his vision, was Galba. Or if he ignored Galba, Otho, and Vitellius as being merely aspirants to power, but never actual emperors, the sixth ruler would be Vespasian. On the other hand the circumstances which called forth the composition of Revelation show that it was written during the closing years of Domitian's reign.[1]

One method of explaining the difficulty is to assume that John uses an older apocalyptic fragment originally composed in the time of Vespasian and incorporated here without a suitable change in the numerical designations. If

[1] See above, pp. 42–54.

this hypothesis is correct, John apparently regarded Titus as the sixth emperor, whose reign was to be short, and Domitian was made a reincarnation of Nero. But this explanation offers serious difficulty. In the first place it is very doubtful whether conditions under Vespasian were such as to call into existence an apocalyptic prophecy of this type. Moreover, if John gave any critical attention to the numerical data involved, the necessity for a change in the statistics would have been apparent. So far as identifying Domitian with Nero is concerned, it is quite inconsistent with the entire representation of the situation elsewhere in the book. John clearly depicts the present sufferings of Christians as merely preliminary to the coming of a future tribulation much greater in severity than anything yet experienced. Nor is the beast to appear until the period of tribulation is within three and a half years of the end (13:5), but Domitian had been in power ten years or more before John wrote Revelation.

On the whole, John's perplexing chronology is most satisfactorily explained by remembering that he was primarily an apocalyptic seer and not a statistical historian. For him it was more important that a number should conform to

sacred requirements than that it should be verifiable in actual records. Indeed, it is quite possible that John would have found it difficult in his situation to obtain an accurate list of emperors extending over a hundred years of past history, even had he felt it necessary to proceed in this fashion. This information would not have been a matter of such common knowledge that the residents of Asia would be able to give offhand Domitian's number in the line of imperial succession any more than the average citizen of the United States is able to give a chronological list of presidents. But a seer does not need to consult archives with painful accuracy for his history. John's fondness for the sacred number seven and the popular notion about Rome's seven hills may have been for him a sufficient basis for assuming that just seven ordinary emperors would successively hold sway over the Roman world before the beast appeared. Moreover, the beast would not be a violation of the sacred number seven, since, although an eighth emperor, he was really to be a second incarnation of one of the seven. Under the inspiration of an apocalyptic vision, and remote from circles of critical historical investigation, it was perfectly easy for

John to assume that Domitian was the sixth emperor.

Even though John's version of Roman political history was not based upon careful investigation of official records, it did rest upon data which undoubtedly seemed to the seer entirely adequate. In the first place a reincarnated Nero was the appropriate person to play the rôle of the beast. Popular Roman tradition regarding his reappearance, and his unenviable reputation as an enemy of Christians, peculiarly fitted him for this office. The persecution of Christians for refusal to worship the emperor had been begun by Domitian, but as yet the movement was not general, nor had any large number of the faithful been called upon to pay the death penalty before Revelation was written. John anticipates that it will take a few years yet for the hostility to develop those gigantic proportions which it will assume under the beast. In the meantime Domitian will be followed by a successor whose reign will be short. Thus time is allowed for the agonies of the period of tribulation to increase to a point where the beast may fittingly begin his three and a half years of fiendish activity, which is to be ended by the coming of the Messiah.

A fanciful feature of the beast's rule will be the emergence of ten vassal kings who will come to his support and be one with him in his wicked designs (vss. 12–17). Together they will go down to defeat before the conquering Messiah, but not until they have done much damage to Rome. These remarks of the seer seem to be an allusion to the civil strife which Nero was popularly expected to introduce when he returned from Parthia, and the prophecy that the city would suffer from fire at the hands of the beast and his assistants recalls the general belief that Nero had been responsible for the conflagration from which Rome had suffered in the year 64 A.D.

XIII. PRONOUNCEMENT OF DOOM UPON ROME (18:1–8)

18:1 *Afterwards I saw another angel descend from heaven with great authority, and the earth was*
2 *illumined with his glory. He shouted with a powerful voice: Fallen, fallen is the mighty Babylon. She has become a dwelling place of demons, a stronghold of every sort of evil spirit and a stronghold of every sort of unclean and*
3 *loathsome bird; because all the nations have drunk of the wine of the divine anger incurred by her forni-*

cation, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the traders of the earth have grown rich from the extravagance of her luxury.

4 *I also heard another voice from heaven exclaim: Come forth out of her, my people, in order that you may not share her sins, and may*
5 *not suffer from her plagues. For the mountain of her sins has reached even to the skies, and God has*
6 *remembered her unjust deeds. Repay her in her own coin, and doubly requite her for her deeds; mix for her a double portion in the cup of wrath*
7 *which she has mixed for others; according as she has paraded her glory and luxury mete out to her torment and lamentation. Since in her arrogance she says, I sit in queenly estate and am no widow,*
8 *nor shall I ever experience grief, therefore plagues of death, lamentation and famine will overtake her in one day and she will be burned with fire. For powerful is the Lord God who has decreed judgment on her.*

The prospect of Rome's overthrow is a subject upon which the seer loves to linger. The doom pronounced upon her in 14:8 is reiterated, and so sure is John of her ultimate downfall that it becomes an already accomplished fact in his vision. The reasons for her destruction are threefold. In the first place she has been

guilty of causing all the world to participate in the fornication of her idolatrous worship of the emperor. Not only the populace but also the subject princes of the Roman world have been induced to accept the imperial cult, thus making it unsafe for a nonconforming Christian to reside in any part of the Empire. Lastly, the luxurious customs of the city have called into being a vast commercial activity in which men grow wealthy and thus have their minds turned away from otherworldly matters of which the early Christians were advocates. John's leanings toward asceticism have already become apparent in the warnings addressed to the churches, and it was but natural that the commerce of the Mediterranean World, which luxurious Roman ways had made possible, should receive his vigorous condemnation.

Christians are called upon to forsake Rome lest they become victims of her impending punishment. The seer is confident that her glory is at an end, for suddenly the wrath of God is to be let loose upon her. The picture which is given of her desolate condition was suggested by similar language used of the ancient Babylon by Jewish writers.[1]

[1] Isa. 13:19–22; cf. 34:8–15; Jer. 51:31–58.

XIV. LAMENTATION OVER ROME'S FALL (18:9–20)

18:9 *The kings of the earth who have committed*
fornication with her and indulged in her luxuries
will weep and lament when they see the smoke of
10 *her burning. Standing afar off for fear of her*
torment, they exclaim, Woe, woe is come upon
the great city, the powerful city of Babylon, for in
a single hour has thy judgment come upon thee.
11 *Also the merchants of the earth will weep and*
mourn over her because there is no longer anyone
12 *left to buy their wares—cargoes of gold and silver*
and gems and pearls, garments of fine linen and
purple and silk and scarlet, every variety of citron
wood and every kind of vessel made of ivory or
13 *costly wood or bronze or iron or marble, also*
cinnamon and amomum ointment and perfume
and myrrh and frankincense and wine and olive
oil and fine flour and wheat, cargoes of horses and
of vehicles and of slaves and of human lives.
14 *The accumulations of thy soul's desire have*
departed from thee, all luxuries and adornments
are lost to thee, and never again will they be
recovered.
15 *The merchants of these wares who grew rich*
from their trade with her stood afar off for fear
of her torment, exclaiming as they wept and

16 *mourned: Woe, woe is come upon the great city*
which was arrayed in garments of fine linen and
purple and scarlet, and was adorned with gold
and gems and pearls, for in a single hour has
such vast wealth been destroyed.
17 *And every navigator and every one who travels*
by water, sailors and every kind of seafaring
18 *laborer, stood afar off exclaiming as they gazed*
upon the smoke of her burning, What city is like
19 *the great city? And they threw dust upon their*
heads as they cried aloud, weeping and mourning:
Woe, woe is come upon the great city in which all
owners of ships became rich through catering to
her extravagance, for in a single hour she has
been destroyed.
20 *Gloat over her, O heaven, even you saints and*
apostles and prophets, for God has given you your
revenge upon her.

The actual destruction of the city of Rome is expected to precede the overthrow of the rest of the heathen world. The kings who have been subject to Rome and those persons who have been engaged in commercial activities will remain to mourn the downfall of the great metropolis. The subordinate princes had been guilty of sharing her luxury, particularly her worship of the emperor, while traders had

grown wealthy in ministering to her extravagant tastes. Therefore they too must suffer by witnessing her overthrow. With evident satisfaction John portrays their astonishment and distress. Kings lament the loss of their patroness, and merchants bemoan the loss of their market. The mourning of the heathen over Rome is modeled after Ezekiel's account of the lamentation over Tyre,[1] but John adds new items to the description in accordance with his own particular situation.

The seer's hostility toward the active commercial life of the age is especially pronounced. Rome was the great world-market to which wares from all parts of the Empire were brought. She purchased costly gems, elaborate garments, handsome ornaments, expensive unguents, delicate foods, horses and vehicles, numerous slaves, and many gladiators whose very lives were bartered to satisfy Rome's lust for blood. The sea was the chief route by which merchandise was imported, hence shipowners, navigators, and all who gain a livelihood upon the sea will join in the lamentation. But the slaughtered saints in heaven will view with complete satisfaction this display of divine

[1] Ezek., chaps. 27 f.

vengeance for which they have been so patiently waiting (6:9–11).

XV. CERTAINTY OF ROME'S DESTRUCTION (18:21–24)

18:21 *Then a powerful angel taking up a stone as large as a millstone, cast it into the sea, exclaiming: In this violent manner will the great city of Babylon be hurled to destruction and never*
22 *again be seen. No music of harpists and singers and flute players and trumpeters will ever again be heard in thee, nor will any sort of craftsman ever again be found in thee, nor will the grinding*
23 *of the mill ever again be heard in thee. No light of a lamp will ever again shine in thee, and no voice of bridegroom or bride will ever again be heard in thee. For thy merchants were the great men of the earth, and by thy magic all the nations*
24 *were led astray. And in her was found blood of prophets and saints and of all who have been slain on earth.*

The final scene confirming the prophecy of Rome's destruction is a symbolic act performed by a powerful angel, who hurls a great millstone into the sea, where it is instantly lost from view. So shall the wicked city vanish from the face of the earth when overtaken by the day of God's

judgment. No form of activity will any longer remain on the spot where she has stood. Her luxurious commercial life, the magic of her idolatry, and her cruel slaughter of Christians have marked her for irrevocable and eternal doom.

This vision brings the seer to another noteworthy landmark on his journey. He represented the distressing period of the third woe as a time when Satan, after his ejection from heaven, would direct his hostility especially against Christians. He would choose as his immediate agent a monstrous emperor that would demand universal worship from his subjects. Christians' refusal to comply with this demand would bring upon them a terrible persecution. But since God had already begun action against the powers of evil by ejecting Satan from heaven, the latter's depredations upon earth could at most continue only a short time. Therefore his representative, the city of Rome, was necessarily destined for early destruction. With the accomplishment of this event Christians would be fully vindicated, and the time for the Messiah's advent would arrive.

John seeks to comfort his suffering fellow-Christians with this promise of Rome's

overthrow. Their present trials under Domitian are only a foretaste of the afflictions to overtake them in the last times, but they may be certain of ultimate triumph. After the death of the present emperor a successor will rule for a brief period before the coming of the beast who is to reign three and a half years. Then Rome will perish and Christians' sufferings will be avenged.

CHAPTER VII

THE FINAL TRIUMPH (REV., CHAPS. 19–22)

John's visions of final distress had culminated in a vivid description of Rome's overthrow. Long and fondly the seer had lingered upon scenes depicting the fate to overtake the wicked city in punishment for its advocacy of emperor-worship and its consequent persecution of Christianity. It remains for him to describe briefly the final triumph of righteousness which is to bring an end to the present evil order and to result in the establishment of a new régime, where the saints will enjoy a life of perfect bliss.

The first scene in these closing visions is one of celestial rejoicing over the downfall of Rome and the early advent of the Messiah (19:1–10). The triumphant appearing of the Messiah (19:11–21) and his rule of one thousand years with the martyrs upon earth (20:1–6) are briefly described. At the close of the millennium Satan is to be temporarily released in order that his activities may provide a setting for the enactment of the final judgment

(20:7–15). This event is to be followed immediately by the dissolution of the old order of existence and the establishment of a new world (21:1–8). This general picture of the new age is supplemented by a more extended account of the new Jerusalem in which the righteous are to live happily throughout eternity (21:9—22:5). Then the book closes with a series of final instructions to John (22:6–17) and a few brief exhortations to the readers (22:18–21).

I. REJOICING IN HEAVEN (19:1–10)

19:1 *Afterwards I heard a sound resembling a loud*
shout of a great multitude in heaven exclaiming:
Hallelujah, salvation and glory and power are
2 *the possession of our God, for his judgments are*
unerring and righteous. By executing judgment
upon the great harlot who ruined the earth with
her fornications, he has exacted vengeance from
her for the blood of his servants.
3 *And a second time the heavenly voices ex-*
claimed: Hallelujah, for throughout all eternity
4 *smoke keeps arising from her. Also the twenty-*
four dignitaries and the four living creatures
falling down and worshiping God who occupies
5 *the throne, exclaimed, Verily, hallelujah. And a*

voice emanating from the throne, exclaimed: Let all his servants, those of both low and high degree who fear his name, render praise to our God.

6 *Again I heard a sound resembling the shout of a great multitude and the roaring of mighty breakers and the pealing of loud thunder, exclaiming: Hallelujah, for the Lord God Almighty* 7 *has assumed his rule. Let us hail him and rejoice and render him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb is now to take place, and his bride has* 8 *made herself ready. She has been permitted to robe herself in shining white fine linen. The fine linen as you know is the righteous deeds of the saints.*

9 *Then an angel said to me, Write, blessed are those who have been called to the marriage feast of the Lamb. Again he said to me, These are the* 10 *reliable words of God. Then I fell at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, Beware, stop that, for I am a fellow-servant with you and your brethren, who have received the testimony of Jesus; worship God. The testimony of Jesus is, as you know, the inspiration of prophecy.*

The celestial hosts exult over the prospective downfall of the city of Rome, hailing the event as God's vindication of the persecuted saints who had been slain for their refusal to participate in the worship of the emperor. A further

occasion for rejoicing lies in the fact that the time for the Messiah's advent had arrived. This predicted consummation is somewhat mysteriously described as the marriage of the Lamb, to be accompanied by a wedding banquet at which the saints are guests. Probably John thinks of the new Jerusalem as the Messiah's bride. This splendidly adorned celestial city is now ready to be let down upon earth in order to provide a place of residence for the victorious Messiah after he has overthrown his Satanic enemies. The parenthetical remark that the bride's shining robes are to be identified with the righteous deeds of the saints has no obvious meaning and is commonly regarded as an interpretative comment appended by some Christian scribe when recopying the text. The remark would have been appropriate in a Christian circle which regarded the saints themselves, or the church, as the bride, but apparently for John it was the new Jerusalem that held this place of distinction (21:2, 9; 22:17).

The representation of the Messiah as a bridegroom, whose advent is the occasion for a banquet of the saints, was a phase of Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic thinking, while the people of Israel or Zion itself represented

the bride.[1] This type of imagery naturally appealed to John, serving as it did to heighten the mystery and awe of impending events. At this point the dignity of the Christian prophet is especially stressed by a report of the seer's conversation with the angel. The speaker's position in the angelic world is not defined, but his dignity is represented as in no respect superior to that of John and his fellow-Christians, who are in possession of the prophetic truth which has been communicated to them by Jesus. The revelation which Jesus mediates to his followers is regarded as the ultimate source of every Christian prophet's wisdom, and the possession of such knowledge by Christians is thought to place them on a level of dignity with the angels. At the same time the author probably aimed a tacit protest against the growing tendency, already manifest in certain Jewish and Jewish-Christian circles of Asia, to worship angels.[2]

II. THE TRIUMPHANT MESSIAH (19:11–21)

19:11 *Then I saw the heavens opened and beheld a white horse, and seated thereon was the faithful*

[1] IV Ezra 10:25 ff.; Mark 2:19; Matt. 22:1 ff.; 25:1 ff.; Luke 12:35 ff.

[2] See Col. 2:18 f.

and reliable one, who judges and wages war in
12 *righteousness. His eyes flashed like a flame of*
fire, upon his head were many diadems, and
inscribed upon him was a name known only to
13 *himself. He wore a garment dyed with blood, and*
the name by which he was called was the Logos
14 *of God. He was followed by the warriors of*
heaven attired in shining white fine linen and
15 *riding upon white horses. From his mouth pro-*
jected a sharp sword with which he is to smite
down the nations, for he will rule them with a
rod of iron and will tread the winepress of the
16 *fierce anger of God Almighty. Inscribed upon*
his garment and upon his thigh was the title, King
of Kings and Lord of Lords.

17 *Then I saw an angel standing on the sun, and*
shouting with a loud voice he called to all the
birds which fly in mid-air: Come, assemble, for
18 *the great feast of God in order that you may eat*
flesh of kings and flesh of commanders and flesh
of strong men and flesh of horses and of their
riders and flesh of everybody, both free men and
slaves and those of both low and high degree.

19 *Then I saw the beast and the kings of the*
earth and their hosts assembled for battle with the
one who sat upon the horse and with his army.
20 *But the beast was captured together with his false*

prophet, who performed on his behalf marvelous feats, by which he led astray those who received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. Both of these beings were thrown alive into the
21 *fiery lake of burning brimstone, but the rest of their hosts were slain with the sword projecting from the mouth of the one who was sitting upon the horse, and all the birds of heaven gorged themselves upon the carcasses.*

The conquering Messiah as seen by John is an impressive figure. The details of the scenery are a combination of Jewish and early Christian imagery, including also some features of popular gentile thinking, all blended together into a new picture by the vividness of the seer's own imaginative powers. Here the warrior Messiah does not appear riding upon a cloud as in certain other Jewish and Christian representations, but is mounted upon a white horse. His angelic army is also composed of horsemen. The use of the horse in apocalyptic pictures was undoubtedly common in John's day, especially in quarters where Persian thinking had exerted a perceptible influence.

The flashing eye of the Messiah, the sword projecting from his mouth, and his harsh rule over the nations are features which John had

noted on previous occasions (1:14, 16; 2:18, 27). The numerous diadems on his head are an indication of his royal dignity, while for an age familiar with magic the secret name inscribed upon him would guarantee his superior power (2:17; 3:12). In calling him the Logos of God probably John does not mean to disclose the secret name previously mentioned but rather to give an additional title of dignity borne by the Messiah. To reveal the secret name would have endangered the authority of its possessor, a thing which John certainly would not do. The only alternative is to suppose that the reference to the Logos of God is the work of a later scribe, who, through his familiarity with the Fourth Gospel, thought himself capable of deciphering the secret name. In favor of this supposition is the fact that Logos was more appropriate in a philosophical estimate of Christ's significance than in an apocalyptic description of his regal and military supremacy. The bloody garment is also typical of the conquering warrior, who slaughters his enemies even as grapes are crushed in the winepress (14:19 f.). As a further indication of his superior authority he bears the title King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The carnage will be so terrible that the carcasses of the slain will litter the ground and become food for all the birds of prey. Despite the overthrow of the city of Rome the imperial beast who still holds sway over the Empire (chap. 13) will assemble his armies and those of his subject-princes to fight with the Messiah. But only the emperor and the chief priest of his cult are to be saved alive, in order that they may be consigned to a more terrible fate than death itself would be. They are to be thrown into the fiery lake of burning brimstone, where they will be tortured throughout eternity, while the Christian saints whom they have slaughtered for refusal to worship the emperor will enjoy a season of millennial bliss in company with the Messiah.

III. THE MILLENNIUM (20:1–6)

20:1 *Again I saw an angel descend from heaven*
with the key of the abyss and a great chain in his
2 *hand. He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent,*
who is the devil and Satan, and binding him for
3 *a thousand years, he cast him into the abyss,*
closing and sealing the exit over him, in order
that he might not again lead astray the nations
until the millennium has come to an end. After
that he is to be released for a short time.

4 *Also I saw thrones and upon them sat certain persons who were permitted to execute judgment. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their loyalty to the testimony of Jesus and to the word of God; that is, those who worshiped neither the beast nor his image and received not his mark upon their forehead or their hand. These were restored to life and ruled in company*
5 *with the Messiah a thousand years. The rest of the dead were not restored to life until the mil-*
6 *lennium had passed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are all who participate in the first resurrection, for they are immune from the sting of the second death, and they will be priests of God and of the Messiah and will rule in company with him a thousand years.*

Previously John has mentioned the abyss with its locked passage guarded by a celestial being (9:1 f.). On the former occasion the abysmal aperture had been opened to permit the exit of fiendish locusts, but on the present occasion the entrance is unlocked to admit Satan. For a thousand years he is to remain imprisoned, while the Messiah and his martyred followers dwell happily upon earth. Then Satan will be temporarily released to perform his last act of hostility by assembling enemies

from remote regions to wage war against the millennial saints.

The belief in a millennial interregnum is a product of later Jewish apocalyptic speculation. The messianic hope of earlier times had pictured the coming of the day when the earth would be purified and Israel would be given a glorious and permanent national restoration. But when this national hope failed of fulfilment there arose a belief in the coming of a new kingdom to descend directly from heaven, thus providing a suitable home for all the righteous. The distinguishing feature in this later form of belief, commonly called the apocalyptic hope, was not the renewal of Israel's earthly glory but the introduction of a new celestial régime of righteousness.[1] Both the national kingdom and the apocalyptic kingdom as originally conceived seem to have been of eternal duration and hence were mutually exclusive. But certain apocalyptists effected a compromise between these two types of hope by predicting a temporary rule of the Messiah upon earth in a renewed Palestine or in a restored Jerusalem prior to

[1] For a more extended discussion of these forms of messianic hope see S. J. Case, *The Millennial Hope* (Chicago, 1918), pp. 69–98.

the enactment of a final judgment and the inauguration of a new cosmic order. The author of the Secrets of Enoch (32:1 f.; 33:1 f.) looked for a great change to occur six thousand years after creation, when a blissful sabbath of one thousand years would prevail upon earth before the present world came to an end. In IV Ezra (7:28–30) the temporary messianic kingdom is expected to endure four hundred years. Still other apocalyptic writers, who made no attempt to determine the exact length of the period, expected the establishment of a messianic interregnum upon the present earth.

John follows the type of later Jewish thinking which blended the national and the apocalyptic forms of hope. He predicted a temporary reign of the Messiah upon earth to be followed by a complete overthrow of Satan after his release and a final enactment of judgment before the introduction of the new eternal order from heaven. In this respect Revelation is unique among the New Testament books. While belief in Jesus as an apocalyptic Messiah was common among New Testament writers, the author of Revelation is the only one who openly espouses the contemporary Jewish idea of a millennial interregnum. In this connection

he alludes somewhat vaguely to judgment thrones, an item which apparently reflects the influence of the language of Dan. 7:9. As yet, however, there is no one upon whom judgment is to be passed unless it be the risen martyrs, who alone are to share the privileges of the millennium. They only have part in the first resurrection, since all the rest of the dead, both righteous and wicked alike, must await the time of the final judgment. At that time all sinners will be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death (2:11; 20:14), but the millennial saints are immune from this danger. Their death for refusal to worship the emperor guarantees their future bliss throughout all eternity.

IV. THE LAST CONFLICT AND FINAL JUDGMENT (20:7–15)

20:7 *At the close of the millennium Satan will be*
8 *released from his prison, and will come forth to lead astray the nations situated at the remote bounds of the earth, Gog and Magog, assembling them for battle. They are numerous as the sands*
9 *on the seashore, and coming up upon the broad plain of the earth, they encircle the encampment of the saints, even the beloved city. But fire*

10 *descending from heaven consumes them and the devil who led them astray is cast into the fiery lake of brimstone where the beast and the false prophet were, and there they will be tormented day and night throughout eternity.*

11 *Then I saw a great white throne occupied by one from whose presence both the earth and the sky fled so far away that they were nowhere to be*
12 *found. Also I saw the dead, those of both high and low degree, standing before the throne, while books of doom were opened. Another book, which is the book of life, was also opened. Then the dead were judged according to their deeds as*
13 *recorded in the books. The sea yielded up its dead and Death and Hades liberated their dead, and all were judged according to their deeds.*
14 *Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. Punishment in the lake of fire is the second*
15 *death, and if anyone's name was not found recorded in the book of life that person was cast into the lake of fire.*

The release of Satan from the abyss introduces the last scene in the final conflict with evil. The description of Satan's final effort to assert himself is a favorite theme with apocalyptic writers, whose imagery is freely appropriated by John. The supporters of Satan are

also traditional mythical enemies of Israel, which were to be gathered from the remote parts of the earth for final conflict. Probably for John the most immediate source of this idea is Ezek., chaps. 38 f., but the development of the thought in later Jewish apocalyptic is also familiar to the Christian seer. The Sibylline Oracles predict a time when "the kings of the nations shall throw themselves against this land in troops, bringing retribution on themselves . . . . in a ring round the city the accursed kings shall place each one his throne with his infidel people by him. And then with a mighty voice God shall speak unto all the undisciplined, empty-minded people, and judgment shall come upon them from the mighty God, and all shall perish at the hand of the Eternal."[1] So John predicts, not only the destruction of the heathen armies, but likewise the final overthrow of Satan.

Also in his description of the final judgment John follows the conventional lines of Jewish apocalyptic. God rather than the Messiah is represented as the judge. His appearing in regal splendor marks the end of the present world, for both earth and sky vanish before him. Seated upon a radiant throne he executes

[1] Sib. Or. iii. 663 ff.; see also I En. 56:5–8.

a universal judgment, the millennial saints alone being exempt from this ordeal. It was commonly believed that an accurate record of the deeds performed both by the wicked and by the righteous was carefully kept in heaven, to be consulted on the day of judgment.[1] All persons who had perished by drowning, everyone who had died in the more usual way, having been seized by the fiendish monsters Death and Hades (6:8), will be restored to life. Similarly in I En. 51:1 it is said, "In those days shall the earth also give back that which has been entrusted to it, and Sheol also shall give back that which it has received, and hell shall give back that which it owes." These demons, Death and Hades, together with all the dead whose names are not recorded in the book of life, are to be thrown into the lake of eternal fire, where the beast and his priest and Satan are already receiving their punishment. A general resurrection and a fiery torment for the wicked are familiar notions of Jewish apocalyptic, which John freely appropriates.

[1] Mal. 3:16; Dan. 7:10; 12:1; I En. 47:3; 81:4; 89:61–77; 90:20; 98:8; IV Ezra 6:20; Bar. 24:1; see also Rev. 3:5.

V. THE NEW WORLD (21:1–8)

21:1 *Then I saw a new sky and a new earth, for*
the former sky and the former earth had vanished,
2 *and the sea no longer exists. And I saw descend-*
ing out of heaven from God the holy city, a new
Jerusalem, prepared as a bride attired for her
3 *husband. And I heard a great voice emanating*
from the throne exclaim: Behold God's abode is
with men, and he will dwell with them, and they
will be his people; even God himself will be with
4 *them and he will dry their eyes of every tear.*
There will be no more death, neither weeping nor
lamentation nor pain will ever occur again. The
5 *old order of existence has come to an end. Then*
he who occupies the throne said, Behold I create
all things anew. Again he said, Record what
I am about to tell you, for these words are true and
6 *reliable. Then he told me: All things have*
reached completion; I am the Alpha and the
Omega, the beginning and the end. I will permit
the thirsty one to drink without cost from the
7 *fountain of living water. The one who conquers*
will inherit these privileges, for I will be his God
8 *and he will be my son. But the faint-hearted, the*
unfaithful, the polluted, the murderers, the forni-
cators, the magicians, the idolaters, and all kinds

of liars, are destined for the fiery lake of burning brimstone, which is the second death.

As the wicked have a fitting place of eternal torment allotted to them, so the righteous are to be provided with a new abode in the form of a new world. The hope of world-renewal had been entertained by the Jews with increasing insistence ever since the time of the Babylonian exile. But among apocalyptic writers the idea of renewal had been gradually displaced by a belief that the old world would disappear, making way for a new world,[1] or a new Jerusalem—particularly after the earthly city was destroyed in 70 A.D.—to be let down from heaven. The Messiah in John's picture is already on earth, where he has dwelt with the saints during the millennium, and now John sees the new Jerusalem in bridal attire ready to come to the messianic bridegroom (19:7). Not only does John see a vision of this new world, but he hears words of positive assurance from God himself reiterating promises with which the reader is already familiar (1:8; 2:7; 7:16 f.). On the other hand, those who are faint-hearted or unfaithful in times of persecution and those who are defiled by sin will have no part in the new order.

[1] I En. 45:4; 90:28 ff.; Sib. Or. v. 420–33.

VI. THE NEW JERUSALEM (21:9—22:5)

21:9 *Again I saw one of the seven angels, who had*
the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and
he addressed me thus: Come let me show you the
10 *bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me*
away in the Spirit to a great high mountain,
where he showed me the holy city Jerusalem de-
11 *scending out of heaven from God, and possessing*
the glory of God. Its radiance resembled that of
a very costly gem, such as a crystal-like jasper
12 *stone. It had a massive and high wall with twelve*
gates, at which twelve angels were stationed, and
upon which were inscribed the names of the
13 *twelve tribes of the children of Israel. There were*
three gates on the east, three gates on the north,
three gates on the south, and three gates on the
14 *west. The wall also had twelve foundation stones,*
upon which were the twelve names of the twelve
apostles of the Lamb.
15 *And he who was speaking with me had a gold*
measuring reed for the purpose of measuring the
16 *city and its gates and its wall. The city was in*
the form of a square, its length and its breadth
being the same. He measured the city with the
reed, and it was about fifteen hundred miles, its
17 *length and breadth and height being equal. He*
also measured the wall, and it was about two

hundred feet high according to man's way of measuring, which was the standard used by the
18 *angel. The wall was constructed of jasper, but the city was of transparent gold resembling pure glass.*
19 *The foundation stones of the city's wall were adorned with every variety of costly gem. The first foundation stone was jasper, the second*
20 *sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth*
21 *amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate being composed of a single pearl, while the principal street of the city was of pure gold transparent as glass.*
22 *However, I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple;*
23 *nor has the city any need that the sun or the moon should shine there, for the glory of God has*
24 *illumined it, and the Lamb is its light. The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the*
25 *earth will bring into it their splendor. Its gates will never be closed during any part of the day,*
26 *for night will never be known there, and into it will be brought the splendor and wealth of the*
27 *nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who acts abominably or tells a lie, but*

only those whose names are inscribed in the Lamb's book of life.

22:1 *Also he showed me a river of living water sparkling like crystal, which issued from the*
2 *throne of God and of the Lamb, and flowed through the middle of the city's principal street. Overhanging the river on both sides was the tree of life, which produced twelve kinds of fruit, yielding one kind each month, and the leaves of the tree served for*
3 *the healing of the nations. No accursed thing will any longer exist. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will*
4 *render him worshipful service, beholding his face,*
5 *and his name will be on their foreheads. Night will no longer exist, and they will not need either light of a lamp or light of a sun, for the Lord God will shine upon them and they will rule throughout eternity.*

John's visions of future history might very fittingly have come to a close with 21:8. At this point he had witnessed the establishment of the new age and the assignment to mortals of eternal punishments and eternal rewards. But before laying aside his pen he supplements his previous revelation with a lengthy description of the new Jerusalem. This information is acquired by the seer in a special vision mediated

by one of the angels who had previously told him of the seven great plagues to occur during the time of the last woe (15:1).

This picture of the new Jerusalem is phrased in language derived largely from the Old Testament and later Jewish books describing the restored Palestine of prophetic expectation and the heavenly city of apocalyptic fancy. For John, however, the new Jerusalem is no longer merely a glorified earthly city, but is a purely heavenly creation to descend from above. In order to depict its great magnificence he employs the most extravagant language of ancient national expectations, the most vivid scenery of Jewish apocalyptic hopes, and the most brilliant phraseology that his own imagination could devise.[1] When one remembers that in all probability John was aiming chiefly at impressiveness, his language is easily understood. Only a few items in his description call for interpretative comment.

In the measurement of the city it is not clear whether fifteen hundred miles is the length of

[1] For Old Testament antecedents see especially the parallel ideas in Isa. 52:1; 60:3, 5, 11, 19 f.; Ezek. 42:16–20; 44:9; 47:1–12; 48:31–35; Zech. 14:7 f. For kindred features in Jewish apocalyptic writers see I En. 25:4–6; 45:4 ff.; 56:3 ff.; 98:2 ff.; 105:1 f.; IV Ezra 7:26; 8:52; 10:27, 43–54; 13:36; Bar. 4:2–6; 32:6; 57:2.

each side or of all four sides together. Probably the former is intended, in which case the new city would cover an area many times greater than the whole of Palestine, which embraced not more than ten thousand square miles. That the buildings of the city should be fifteen hundred miles high might at first sight seem strange. But undoubtedly the seer felt no incongruity in supposing that in the new age, when men would be like angels, it would be perfectly easy for them to occupy mansions extending for many miles above the level of the city's streets. By remarking that the angel used the standard of measurement which was commonly employed among men, John gives his readers a more concrete notion of the size of the new Jerusalem.

A few items in the description are inconsistent with certain particulars of earlier visions. In the present picture the gentile nations and their kings voluntarily submit to the rule of God and bring their wealth into the new city (21:24). Healing for them is also provided by the leaves of the tree of life (22:2). On the contrary John's previous vision of the divine triumph (19:19–21; 20:15) involved the complete destruction of all earth's inhabitants, the

saints only being saved alive to enjoy future blessings. The gentile nations were not to be healed but were to be destroyed, kings and their subjects alike being cast into eternal torment. As a matter of fact the utter destruction of the Gentiles is normal to John's own point of view as an apocalyptist. But in his present description he takes over certain traditional features originally belonging to the national hope of a restored and glorified Israel dwelling among gentile peoples who would willingly submit to Israel's supremacy.

VII. FINAL INSTRUCTIONS TO JOHN (22:6–17)

22:6 *Then the angel said to me, These words are*
true and reliable, for the Lord God of the
spirits of the prophets sent his angel to disclose
7 *to his servants events which must soon occur. For*
behold my coming is at hand. Blessed is he who
lays to heart the words of the prophecy of this book.
8 *I John am the one who heard and saw these*
revelations, and on hearing and seeing I fell down
to worship at the feet of the angel who disclosed
9 *these things to me. But he said to me, Beware,*
stop that, for I am a fellow-servant with you, and
with your brother prophets and with those who
lay to heart the words of this book; worship God.

10 *Then he said to me, Do not seal up the prophetic*
message of this book, for the time of its fulfillment
11 *is near. Let the unrighteous man become yet*
more unrighteous, and he who is defiled become
yet more defiled; let the righteous man continue
to do righteousness, and the holy man continue in
his holiness.
12 *Behold my coming is at hand, and I mete out*
punishment requiting each man according to the
13 *character of his deeds. I am the Alpha and the*
Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and
14 *the end. Blessed are they who wash their robes,*
for they will be permitted access to the tree of life,
15 *and entrance through the gates into the city. But*
the heathen, magicians, adulterers, murderers,
idolators, and every one who likes or tells a lie,
will be shut out.
16 *I, Jesus, sent my angel to give you this message*
for the churches. I am of the line and family of
David, the bright morning star.
17 *Both the Spirit and the bride say, Come. Let*
every one who hears the reading of this book say,
Come. And let every one who thirsts come; let
every one who desires, receive without cost the
water of life.

John's visions end with emphatic assurances that his revelation is properly authenticated

and that the events which it forecasts are very soon to be fulfilled. Verses 6 and 7 are essentially a repetition of the first paragraph of the book (1:1–3). Undoubtedly the coming one whose early advent is affirmed is the Messiah (1:7; 3:3, 11; 16:15).

Again, as in 19:10, John declares that the book is a product of his own visions, and that in his capacity as a Christian prophet he stands on a level with the angel who has communicated to him this heavenly vision. In comparison with the alleged methods of earlier apocalyptic writers, he is authorized to follow a new course of procedure. It was assumed that his predecessors, after recording their visions, had sealed up their books in order that their message might not become known until a later day, when the events predicted were about to occur (Dan. 8:26; 12:4, 9). John, however, is sure that the last times have now come. Hence his prophecies are not to be sealed up for use by a future generation, but are to be delivered directly to his contemporaries. So near is the end that already fates are practically determined, and during the relatively few days that remain sinners will continue in wickedness, while the righteous will maintain their purity.

It is not perfectly clear whether the proclamation of verses 12–15 is an utterance of God or of the Messiah. The terms, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, have previously been used of God (1:8; 21:6), but the Messiah also is called the first and the last (1:17; 2:8). Probably in this connection John does not wish to discriminate sharply between the work of God and of the Messiah, but rather is stressing the certainty of the climax soon to be reached by their co-operative catastrophic intervention in the affairs of the decadent world. The promise of rewards for the faithful and the exclusion of the wicked are reiterations of earlier predictions (21:8, 27). Similarly in verse 16 the opening sentence of the book (1:1) is reaffirmed in the declaration that John received his revelation through an angelic mediator whom Jesus selected for this purpose.

The ecstatic utterances of verse 17 stress the nearness of the end. The Spirit by which the prophetic seer has been inspired, and the bride, which is the new Jerusalem in personified form, both call for the advent of the Messiah. The congregations to whom the book is to be read are admonished to express the same wish. And, finally, all the hearers are invited to

participate in the blessings now on the point of realization.

VIII. FINAL EXHORTATION TO THE READERS (22:18–21)

22:18 *I assure all persons in whose hearing the prophetic message of this book is read, that if anyone makes additions to it, God will impose*
19 *upon him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone sets aside any of the prophetic teachings of this book, God will deprive him of his part in the tree of life and in the holy city which are described in this book.*
20 *The one who attests this message says, Indeed, my coming is at hand. Verily, Come, Lord Jesus.*
21 *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all.*

In conclusion John addresses a few words of personal instruction to his readers. So thoroughly convinced is he of the accuracy of his revelation that he believes the eternal destiny of his contemporaries will be determined by the attitude which they take toward his interpretation of history. Apparently he had reason to suspect that not even all Christians would readily fall into line with his notions about the early end of the world. But the belief in an

early catastrophic advent of the Messiah had taken possession of the seer so completely that he could pronounce unalterable doom upon any one who would venture to set aside or revise his predictions.

CHAPTER VIII

TYPICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF REVELATION

With great assurance John had essayed a prediction of coming events. He was certain that God would presently intervene to visit complete destruction upon the wicked Roman Empire in punishment for its persecution of the Christians. With all the mysterious paraphernalia of an apocalyptic book, yet in unmistakable terms, the seer had interpreted the events of his own day under Domitian as merely preliminary to an early acceleration of agonies to culminate in the Messiah's catastrophic advent. Domitian was to be succeeded by an emperor whose "rule must be brief" and then would appear the beast whose activities were to continue for three and a half years (17:10 f.; 13:5). While the beast remained in power the Roman world would be visited by terrible disasters, to reach a climax in the complete overthrow of the imperial city (chaps. 16–18). Then the beast would muster his armies for final conflict, but they would go down in complete defeat before the heavenly Messiah when he

came to take up his residence for a thousand years with the risen martyrs upon a renewed earth (19:11—20:6).

This was to be the glorious consummation of history as predicted by John. The time of the end was not specifically determined, but its approximate date was clearly indicated. Since the book was written during the last decade of the first century, evidently the author expected the overthrow of Rome, the advent of the Messiah, and the establishment of the millennium early in the second century. But century after century passed, leaving John's expectations unfulfilled. The Roman imperial régime maintained its undivided sway over the Mediterranean World until the latter part of the fifth century, and the city of Rome itself remains standing even down to the present time. History also proved that John's hope of the Messiah's early coming to set up his visible rule upon earth was not to be realized. In the course of time Christianity triumphed over its persecutors, but the victory was secured by a long and tedious process quite different from that predicted in the pages of Revelation.

Thus the historical events of the centuries following the writing of Revelation made it

practically impossible for Christians of succeeding generations to heed John's solemn warning against making additions to or setting aside elements of that prophetic interpretation of the future with which he sought to comfort the persecuted Christians of Asia (22:18 f.). The pressure of the persecution which had prompted his visions ceased with the death of Domitian in 96 A.D., and time so quickly rendered impossible a fulfilment of the specific forecast of impending events which he had outlined that the original meaning of the book early became obscure. In consequence of this obscurity various notions, quite different from those originally entertained by John, have been read into his language by subsequent interpreters. Probably no other book of the New Testament has offered so many difficulties to its readers or inspired so many divergent notions regarding its author's meaning. A sketch of the typical methods that have been employed from time to time in the interpretation of the book, and some observations regarding the interests prompting various types of interpretation, may aid the modern reader in his study of Revelation.[1]

[1] It is not the purpose of the present chapter to give in detail a statistical account of the history of the interpretation of Reve-

I. ANCIENT INTERPRETATION

It is no longer possible to know exactly how John's book was received by the Asian churches to which it was addressed. Doubtless some of their number accepted the words of the seer as truly prophetic of an early catastrophic deliverance from their troubles, while others may have thought that the hostility of the Roman authorities would have to be overcome by a more gradual and more conciliatory method of procedure. Yet the book was found sufficiently interesting to be preserved, and in the latter part of the second century, when an authoritative collection of New Testament writings was brought together, Revelation was given a place in the group on the assumption that its author was the apostle John.

The first explicit approval of the book comes from Justin, a Christian of Rome who suffered a martyr's death soon after 160 A.D. To use his own language, "there was a certain man with us whose name was John, one of the

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lation, but only to note typical methods and different interests underlying these methods. Readers who wish a more extensive discussion of the subject may consult R. H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse* (Edinburgh, 1913), pp. 1–78; or the still more elaborate treatment in W. Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (Göttingen, 1906), pp. 49–119.

apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation that was made to him that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem, and that thereafter the general, and in short the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place."[1] But Justin knows many Christians "who belong to the pure and pious faith and are true Christians,"[2] who reject the views of Revelation regarding the millennium.

In certain Christian circles the Book of Revelation continued to be regarded in an unfavorable light during the second and third centuries. The ecstatic Christian movement known as Montanism, which arose in Phrygia during the latter part of the second century, entertained in a greatly exaggerated form John's contempt for the present world. Advocates of the movement also predicted the early end of the world to be followed immediately by the establishment of Christ's millennial reign. Montanism proved unacceptable to the majority of Christendom, and in some quarters this disfavor carried with it a strong prejudice against Revelation. The most extreme opponents of Montanism are known as the Alogi, who not

[1] *Dial.* 81. 4; see also 80. 5. [2] *Dial.* 80. 2.

only rejected millenarian teachings but also set aside Revelation as unworthy of consideration by Christians. In general, however, Christianity retained the book among its authoritative writings, giving it an established position in the New Testament canon. Once it acquired this distinction, the work of interpretation was imperative.

Since the formal task of interpretation was not undertaken until nearly a hundred years after John's day, the causes which prompted him to write had long ago passed out of memory. In fact changes of circumstances and the passage of time had rendered quite unintelligible his specific scheme of future events, which were to culminate in the end of the world early in the second century. But until within comparatively recent times the expounders of the New Testament writings have not been critical students of history, and consequently they have not been especially interested in John's original meaning, which could be learned only by a process of scientific historical investigation into the circumstances under which John lived. In the absence of such knowledge, and in an age which had little if any interest in this type of historical research, it was perfectly easy for

each new generation of Christians to assume that the author of Revelation had in mind just those ideas and interests that were uppermost in the minds of later generations. Under these circumstances it was inevitable that a great variety of interpretative opinion should gather about the Book of Revelation during the course of the centuries.

While Christians continued to be persecuted by the Roman imperial authorities, there were strong incentives for regarding Revelation as a prophecy of events still awaiting fulfilment. Readers were no longer aware of the original circumstances of the author, nor did they realize that his program had called for the catastrophic advent of Christ almost a century before interpreters began the formal process of expounding the book. Without regard to its historical relationships later readers applied its language as best they could to their own peculiar circumstances. Under the stress of continued persecution they found in it support for belief in the coming of the day when an archenemy of Christianity, commonly called the Antichrist, would appear,[1] after

[1] Though not mentioned in Revelation, this name appears in I John 2:18, 22; 4:3; II John, vs. 7; cf. II Thess. 2:3 f.

which Christ would return to establish the millennium.

The habit of regarding Revelation as predictive of a catastrophic triumph for Christianity in the more or less distant future continued to prevail, particularly in the western Mediterranean World, down to the time of Constantine. But this emperor's toleration of the new religion and its gradual rise to a position of privilege in the Empire eliminated the desire either for a violent overthrow of Rome or for a sudden end of the present world. This turn of events necessitated a new type of exegesis. As distinguished from the futuristic type which had flourished while Rome was antagonistic to Christianity, there arose a new method of interpretation, commonly termed the allegorical or spiritual.

The beginnings of the allegorical exposition of Revelation are found among the Christians of Alexandria even as early as the close of the second century. No formal commentary on the book appeared at that early date, but Clement of Alexandria and Origen interpreted its language in a distinctly allegorical manner. Its statements were not taken literally but were thought to have a purely figurative meaning.

For example, Clement said that the twenty-four dignitaries whom John saw in heaven enthroned in God's presence (4:4) were to be understood as a symbolic indication that within the church both Jews and Greeks, twelve being the sacred symbol for each, are equal before God. Origen is still more thoroughgoing in his application of the allegorical method to the language of Revelation. He ridiculed the idea of a literal establishment of the new Jerusalem upon earth, and insisted that the notion of Christ's return is to be understood in a purely figurative and spiritual sense.

The first formal commentary on Revelation to make extensive use of the allegorical method was written by Ticonius, who flourished about 380 A.D. He belonged to that rigorous sect of Christianity known as the Donatists, who vigorously protested against the secularization of the faith which went on under Constantine and his successors. Although Ticonius expected the literal return of Christ at an early date, John's descriptions of future distress were taken allegorically as references to the conflict between good and evil in general. So throughout Revelation Ticonius detected behind specific names and incidents a general spiritual teaching re-

garding events of his own day, while the historical happenings of John's time were lightly passed by or utterly ignored.

Early in the fifth century the allegorical method of interpreting Revelation was standardized by Augustine.[1] He took no account of the actual situation of John and his readers, and the vivid future predictions of the book were consistently spiritualized. Its specific prophecies of Christ's advent were explained to mean that his coming "continually occurs in his church, that is in his members, in which he comes little by little and piece by piece, since the whole church is his body." The millennium predicted in Rev. 20:5 f. was also allegorized by identifying it with that period of Christian history which began when Jesus bound the strong man, Satan (Mark 3:27). Since Christianity in Augustine's day had ceased to be persecuted and had become the favored religion of the state, he could not accept John's notion regarding the Satanic character of the Roman imperial régime. Therefore the sphere of Satan's activities was found in the wicked pagan multitudes who refused to accept Christianity. Their hearts constituted for Augustine the

[1] *City of God*, xx.

abysmal pit to which John had consigned Satan during the thousand years of Christ's rule upon earth. Thus the present church was the true city of God wherein the saints reigned. With the passing of the years this new heavenly kingdom was to increase "until we come to that most peaceful kingdom in which we shall reign without an enemy, and it is of this first resurrection in the present life that the Revelation speaks."

Augustine's thoroughgoing allegorization of Revelation was followed with scarcely any deviation for more than five hundred years. The church felt itself so well established in the world and its political status was so secure that it had no sympathy with, and no power to appreciate, John's ardent desire for an early end of the world. Nor did his tirade against the evil political order of his time have any meaning for these later readers, surrounded as they were by a very different set of circumstances. If they were to read the Book of Revelation at all its prophecies of impending afflictions could not be understood as referring to concrete historical events to be actually experienced by Christians. On the contrary, Christianity was now in the ascendancy. Therefore John's predictions of

bitter conflict between the imperial Satanic beast and the struggling Christian movement were freely allegorized into a breach between the community of unbelievers on the one hand and the faithful people of God on the other. Also the millennial triumph of Christianity as proclaimed by John was now thought to be already in process of realization.

II. TRADITIONAL PROTESTANT INTERPRETATION

The comparative satisfaction which the church felt with its status in the present world prevailed from the time of Augustine down to the rise of the reforming monastic orders and the beginnings of the Protestant movements. In the meantime Revelation was commonly interpreted by the allegorical method. But the unrest which manifested itself in various sections of Christianity during the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries led to a revival of interest in Revelation as a prophetic book in which the disturbing events of these later times were seen foreshadowed. Awakening discontent with the established church aroused a suspicion that Christianity was on the decline. John's prophecies of a catastrophic intervention by God to destroy evil and establish

a new order were revived, and the signs of the end which he had foretold were thought to find fulfilment in the events of these later days. Thus the futuristic interpretation of Revelation once more gained in favor at the expense of the allegorical, though frequently the two methods were combined according to the convenience of the individual commentator.

The more extreme critics of the established church affirmed not only that Christianity was on the decline and that the times were growing more evil in anticipation of the end, but that the very church itself was an agent of Satan. Among Protestants it was customary to believe that the beast described by John was none other than the occupants of the papal see or some particular pope. On the other hand Roman Catholics, arguing in a similar manner, freely identified their opponents with the Antichrist. When a pope and an emperor quarreled each could pronounce the other to be the Antichrist beast. Or, again, when Christian preachers sought to awaken interest in the Crusades the Saracens were identified with the beast, while Mohammed himself was called the false prophet, whose coming was foretold in Rev., chap. 13. When this general type of

interpretation gained currency it produced a great abundance of fanciful expositions limited only by the interpreter's skill at finding in the events of his own time fulfilments of supposed prophecies of Revelation. John's own circumstances were entirely ignored, while it was naïvely assumed that he had indulged in the same wild fancies that were entertained by these later commentators.

Still other interpreters who employed the futuristic method placed somewhat less emphasis upon John's prophecies of events contemporary with their own time but found in his book a forecast of the entire course of Christianity's history, if not, indeed, an epitome of the history of the world. This was the view of Luther, through whose influence this type of exposition gained wide currency in Protestant circles. He took the letters to the seven churches as actual messages of exhortation to Christian communities of John's own day, but in the seven seals he saw types of distress which the church had experienced during the general course of its career. The troubles introduced by the seven trumpets were said to be prophetic forecasts of various heresies, and the sixth trumpet was regarded as a specific

reference to Mohammedanism. The angel described in Rev., chap. 10, was identified with the papacy, while the beasts of chapter 13 were explained as the papacy and the imperial German power who were in league against Luther. The prophecy regarding Gog and Magog, whose advent was to follow the millennium (20:8), was said to find its fulfilment in the appearing of the Turks upon the scene one thousand years after the time of John.

Following Luther, traditional Protestant thinking has often treated Revelation as a prophetic epitome of church history. But in certain circles interest has centered more particularly upon John's forecast of the end of the world, each interpreter finding in the events of his own day supposed fulfilments of the premonitory signs presaging the early return of Christ.[1] Periods of social or political unrest have often been appealed to with great assurance as indicating a fulfilment of John's predictions of tribulations to precede the end. The persecution of the Huguenots in France in the seventeenth century, the political unrest in

[1] Among the most influential commentaries of this type are J. A. Bengel, *Erklärte Offenbarung Johannis* (Stuttgart, 1740), and H. Alford's exposition of Revelation in his *Greek Testament* (Cambridge, 1861).

England in the time of Cromwell, the distresses in all Europe resulting from the Napoleonic wars, and the calamities attending the recent world-war of 1914–18 are examples of events which from time to time have stimulated fresh interest in Revelation. Each age has seen in the book specific prophecies of the happenings of its own time, and on the strength of these fulfilments of John's predictions each successive generation of interpreters has confidently declared that the end of the world and the inauguration of the millennium were at hand. But time has always falsified their predictions and disappointed their hopes.

Still other interpreters in more recent times have resorted to a more purely allegorical method. Denying that John had in mind specific events of future history, they find in his pages only a symbolic representation of the conflict between good and evil in general. His prophecy of a final triumph for the righteous is identified with a gradual process of spiritual growth to be effected by a perpetuation of Christian ideals in the present world. These interpreters insist that John's language, which on first sight seems to be so emphatically specific and local in its intention, should really

be taken in a purely figurative and universal sense. John did not mean to describe specific incidents, but deliberately used his concrete imagery to portray great spiritual principles, which it is the business of the modern interpreter to discover. Thus the allegorical method of Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine is perpetuated in modern times.[1]

III. MODERN HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

Interest in strictly historical study came to the fore during the nineteenth century and led to a distinctly new method of interpreting Revelation. The primary aim of this method is to expound the book in the light of the circumstances out of which it came. The task of interpretation is to determine what the language of Revelation meant to the author himself and to his Christian contemporaries of Asia in view of the experiences through which they were passing when the book was written.

John's situation furnishes the point of departure for historical interpretation of his book, and to ascertain the content of his message to his contemporaries is the interpreter's

[1] Typical representatives of this school are W. Milligan, *The Book of Revelation* (London, 1889), and E. W. Benson, *The Apocalypse* (London, 1900).

task. But the fulfilment of this task necessitates several lines of inquiry which have variously engaged the attention of modern students. The political situation which involved the Christians in persecution for their refusal to worship the emperor is the primary fact taken into account by all exponents of the historical method in their study of Revelation. In varying degrees, however, they also give attention to the literary process which produced the book. It is recognized as belonging to a specific type of literature known as apocalypse and is interpreted by the same general principles used in the exposition of other apocalyptic writings.

Since most other apocalypses are composite works, combining earlier and more fragmentary written sources, numerous hypotheses had been advanced to prove the composite character of John's Revelation. Some students have analyzed the book into several different component parts. Still others have favored the theory of a more strictly redactional process by which an original document was enlarged by John. But the majority of historical interpreters incline to the opinion that the book is mainly John's own composition, although he may often have

appropriated from tradition a number of apocalyptic fragments, written or oral in form, which sometimes occasion inconsistencies in his narrative. That he also drew extensively upon current Jewish apocalyptic imagery and occasionally appropriated striking features of gentile mythological fancy is also believed in many quarters.

Historical interpretation is based upon a recognition of all the complex phenomena relating to the production of apocalypses in general and of John's apocalypse in particular. The peculiar psychological processes of the seer, his characteristic literary methods, and his reaction toward his immediate environment thus become determinative for the understanding of his book.[1] Inherited elements taken over from tradition are not always intelligible unless viewed in the light of their origin. For this reason the interpreter may sometimes resort to a study of John's sources, but his main concern is simply with the meaning which John attached to appropriated materials and the import of John's own language. The controlling aim of the modern historical school is

[1] On the forces which went into the making of an apocalypse see above, pp. 125 ff.

to ascertain the meaning which John intended his book to have for the particular readers whom he addressed. In order to accomplish this purpose the interpreter orients himself thoroughly in the specific historical situation of John and his contemporaries, thus learning to read Revelation with their eyes and from the point of view of their immediate interests.

The foregoing sketch of typical methods employed in the interpretation of Revelation exhibits three main tendencies. The first has been termed the futuristic, since it assumes that John had primarily in mind events that were still future for each successive generation of interpreters. As time passed and the predictions which he made with reference to his own situation failed to be fulfilled, the hopes of a later age were arbitrarily read into his language, and the meaning of his imagery was altered to suit these forced interpretations of subsequent times. In the form in which this method is commonly employed today, John's anxiety about his fellow-sufferers in Asia is entirely ignored, or else it must be assumed that he hoped to relieve their anxiety by a promise of divine interference in the affairs of the world

to occur some thousands of years later. But it is quite inconceivable that he could have hoped to comfort his afflicted brethren of Asia with a prophecy about the end of the world to occur in the twentieth century—if indeed it is to occur at even that early a date. By this method of exposition John's references to worship of the imperial beast, his prophecies of the early overthrow of the Roman Empire, his expectation of the speedy coming of Christ, and other vivid features in his description have all to be either greatly distorted or tacitly ignored. Each new generation must read a new meaning into John's words in order that they may be applied to new conditions of which they are assumed to be predictions. Naturally this method of playing fast and loose with a historical document no longer appeals to serious students.

The allegorical type of interpretation is also inadequate. Its chief defect lies in ignoring John's concern with contemporary events and in its subjective method of reading hidden meanings into his language. John becomes an exponent of glittering generalities. His concrete imagery does not refer to definite events of past or future history, but is only a device for expressing general principles underlying the

spiritual order. Accordingly his predictions of Christ's advent must refer to a spiritual coming to be realized within the inner experiences of believers, and the vision of the new Jerusalem is simply a strange way of predicting the gradual triumph of the church throughout the course of the centuries.

Thus also in this method of interpretation the seer stands quite aloof from the storm and stress of the events of his own day. He is made to view history with the eyes of subsequent generations, while he has no immediate concern with the affairs of his contemporaries. While the futuristic method of interpretation makes John deal specifically in coming events of an age far removed from his own, the allegorical method ascribes to him a message so abstract and unrelated to specific historical incidents that it can be suited to the conditions of any age. Both alike do violence to John's message by ignoring the real and concrete elements which alone furnished the occasion for his book and which gave it value for the author and his first readers.

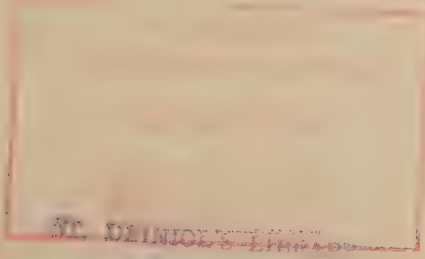
The historical method alone does justice to John and his Asian contemporaries. It is able to hear him speak the language of his time and

to perceive his meaning as understood by the people of that day. It recognizes that he meant what he said when he predicted the early destruction of the Roman Empire, and it readily understands the impelling motives which prompted him to utter such a prophecy. Similarly appropriate to his situation are his predictions of a catastrophic end of the world and his expectation of Christ's early return after only two more emperors had ruled. These realistic phases of John's thinking can be appreciated only by one who employs the historical method, learning to read John's language in the light of hopes and experiences peculiar to that age. His apocalyptic imagery can then be given the meaning that it had in ancient times as illustrated in the typical apocalyptic writings of the period. With this method in hand the long-misunderstood mysteries of Revelation are easily solved.

To be sure, the specific events predicted by John did not come to pass, and Christianity attained its victory over the Roman world by a much more gradual and much less spectacular process than he had anticipated. Nevertheless, his book aimed to serve a very real need of his day, and it attests on every page the author's

sincerity and devotion to the cause which he so loyally supported. In an hour when small and helpless groups of Christians were being threatened by the haughty Roman authorities John rose to the occasion, painting in bold imagery just that type of triumph for Christianity which seemed adequate to him and his like-minded contemporaries.

John's extravagant imagery is no longer capable of making a strong religious appeal to twentieth-century readers; for the language of religion has greatly changed since his day. But John may still be appreciated even though his fancy moved in a world so foreign to moderns. His book may still be read with great profit by one who has eyes to see behind its extravagant language the soul of an early Christian who will ever be an inspiring example of loyalty in the hour of testing. And his contagious faith in the triumph of righteousness can never lose its appeal, obscured though it is by the now antiquated imagery in which it is expressed.



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